

It Happened in Peking

LOUISE JORDAN MILN

IT HAPPENED IN PEKING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

RUBEN AND IVY SEN
THE SOUL OF CHINA
IN A SHANTUNG GARDEN
MR. AND MRS. SEN
THE FEAST OF LANTERNS
MR. WU
THE GREEN GODDESS

IT HAPPENED IN PEKING

BY
LOUISE JORDAN MILN



*"If you have but two loaves of bread,
sell one loaf and buy a lily."*

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TO
FREDERICK A. STOKES

WHOSE FRIENDSHIP I VALUE EVEN
MORE THAN I DO MY PUBLISHER'S
UNFAILING PATIENCE, HELP AND
OVER-GENEROSITY

“If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?”

IT HAPPENED IN PEKING

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CHAPTER I

THEY had but two things in common. They had those two very strongly: a stinging dislike of each other, a bitter dislike of China.

With both the dislike of the other was racial and personal: an inborn prejudice fanned into flame by antagonistic traits, trends and tricks of individuality, mind and manner. Each despised and resented the other, each thought the other insolent in doing so, silly to show it. And in that both were right.

Their dislike of China was ignorance, lack of vision, lack of mental equipment (or mentalities raw and undeveloped), lack of judgment, lack of fairness, lack of common sense: a social and spiritual blindness that made them both all but physically blind to the picture and beauty of Peking. Their open dislike of China, and condemnation of all Chinese, of everything Chinese, was a greater lack, a greater insolence to a far greater thing, than their unveiled dislike of each other.

In her dislike of China, her inability to understand, much less appreciate, the country or its customs and people, Elizabeth had rather more excuse—or so Lee Wong thought—than John Thorn had. For, as Lee Wong reflected, she was the younger, only a woman, and until a few moons ago she never had met or spoken

with any Chinese. Thorn, on the other hand, had seen something of the sons of Han in California and adjacent States. It must be admitted that Thorn had seen but a superficial something of very inferior peasant-ones, if reticence and industry can be stigmatized as superficial traits; but quite enough, Lee Wong considered, to have made anyone of intelligence suspect that the Chinese average might not be inferior to the average of Western capability and probity.

But Lee Wong was not interested in John Thorn and was even less interested in Elizabeth Kent. They amused him for the moment, that was all—as yet. Lee did not dislike either of them at all. Chinese dislike is an emotion as well as a conviction always, and often it is only an emotion. Lee Wong did not consider either Thorn or Miss Kent worthy any emotion of his.

They had to meet, of course, and probably were destined to see a good deal of each other. The European circle in Peking is so sparse that every one of its units unavoidably meets and sees a good deal of all the others.

Thorn had been in Chihli less than a fortnight, Elizabeth not three months when they met on the Wall.

But they already had made up their minds quite decidedly, and Elizabeth indignantly, about China and the Chinese. Thorn thought it a rum hole, and smelly. Elizabeth thought it a disgusting place. Both found it amazingly and disturbingly full of Chinese.

It occurred to neither of them, probably it never would, that there might be other parts of China as little like this as Stratford-on-Avon is like Manchester, as Denver is like Quebec or Tallahassee. They saw Peking; they saw enough.

Peking still *was* Peking then.

T'zū Hsi held her court down there in the Forbidden City. The Beloved Pearl concubine plucked roses of song from her table-lute with tiny fingers that ached from the weight of jeweled rings and nail-protectors. Li Hung Chang wore his yellow jacket and his double-eyed peacock feather.

Vandal devastation scarcely had touched Peking yet. Decay's defacing fingers so lightly had swept here and there that they had added to, rather than marred, her loveliness. Feathery trees and vines bent and twisted out from breaks that they hid in the old Ming wall's time-made crevices. Morning-glories and columbines covered with spiral beauty much of the rubbish heaps that greedy, disrespectful industries (Western-financed for the most part) had piled carelessly against temple walls, caking with dusty dirt when the wind blew high the sacred down-hanging bells and the lion guards of upturned temple eaves. There were sordid rubbish heaps of old tin cans, broken crockery, shreds of discarded garments, decaying vegetables, much else and worse—smirching and stenching many of the temples' lower walls, jostling and stenching the open-air bazaars where the riffraff of Chinese merchandise was bartered noisily under the hot glare of Peking's summers. The bartering was done by day and long into the night, under the coarse flare of hundreds of kerosene lamps and thousands of torches. China has not taken Western missionaries to her bosom or into her confidence, nor our gunboats into her liking, but from the first that reached her, China has taken to the glass kerosene lamp of America enthusiastically. Poor indeed is the Chinese outdoor bazaar vendor that does not own and use a dozen of them. In Shanghai and Singapore the bazaar lamps

have somewhat ousted the more picturesque, if less steady, lights of the native torches. But in Peking the lamps were fewer; the flaming torches predominated the scenes of petty outdoor industries at night.

But the base rubbish heaps, vine-masked or naked, only flecked inconspicuously here and there the glittering panorama framed by the Wall, flecked still less the wider panorama that spread beyond the Wall's outer gates.

The meanest carping eyes could not see meanly the greatest feast of man-made beauty that the World boasts; the beauty of Peking's wonderful fourfold City. The Forbidden City, pink-walled, yellow-roofed, was the sacred core of them all, the holy of holies of the Imperial City that surrounded it, but of which it was scarcely part. Within its own pink-gray walls the Forbidden City was a world apart. The Imperial City, beautiful guardian girdle of that innermost Forbidden City, was the gardened residence of Chinese as well as Manchu élite of China's official world. Surrounding the Imperial City, and between it and the Chinese City, lay the old Manchu-Tartar City in which the bannermen were quartered to protect the Manchus and hold the Chinese at bay. The south wall of the Tartar (or Inner) City is, too, the north wall of the Chinese (or Outer) City in which the Chinese were driven to live when the Manchus conquered them. The Imperial City nestled proudly close against the outer face of those sacred pink walls within which the Son of Heaven, the Old Buddha and all their immediate entourage lived. The Tartar City was built between the walled Imperial City and the inner walls of the sprawling though rectangular Chinese City that served and vassaled the other three.

The great outer Wall of Peking girdled them all: Forbidden, Imperial, Manchu and Chinese cities.

They blended together in harmony, as did the five races that lived in them; but each of the four Peking cities was as individual of picture, as personal in character, as Mongols, Chinese and Tartars were.

Behind Peking the hills were purple and jade, the sky was amethyst and gold. The lavish sunshine burnished the old Coal Hill, kissed the blue-tiled canopy of the Temple of Heaven, dappled a thousand gardens, made old gray temples, as well as temples that were newer and cared-for, golden and radiant. Most of it all—not needing the gold-leaf burnishing of the sun, beyond any telling of human words or of human brush, not poorer than the sunshine itself—most of all were the yellow palace roofs. Miles of yellow roofs, each inch a jewel. Seen from up there on the Wall they looked, as in fact they were, the roofs of a veritable city of royal dwellings and pavilions.

Hot? No. The word is too coarse. 'The moats, the gardens' lakes sparkled coolness. The trees on the lower hill-slopes, the trees in her gardens and parks laved Peking with tender, exquisite refreshment that not even the sun-heat of the month at its worst could scorch or lessen. Peking still kept her state, not intrinsically changed since she had sprung full-panoplied from the mind and might of Yung Loh.

Elizabeth was tired. She had danced until after daybreak and her new slippers had been just a trifle tight. How much longer was Aunt Joan going to walk along the top of this ridiculous Wall? It was here one had to walk, if one walked at all. But

why trouble to walk, in a place like this? They must have walked a mile already. Many a morning at home in Surrey the girl had walked several miles, after dancing half the night before, and had loved it. But this decidedly was not Surrey. And it was home mail day. Perhaps the letters had been delivered already. She wanted her letters. She wanted to curl up in an easy chair and read her letters and rest.

John Thorn was bored. He was not at all tired. Legs the length of his could not tire at the pace his Aunt Hilda set, though they might "go to sleep" and prick like the devil; for Mrs. Paul Van Vleck, short as she was, turned the scales at more than a hundred and forty pounds, moved with maddening slowness, and paused to restore her breath, if she could, every few steps—partly because she wore her garments tight, partly because her feet were ridiculously small and painfully inadequate for their burden.

Thorn was not tired; he had not been up half the night, had not been to a dance, and the incoming mail did not interest him, except that he hoped that there'd be no letters for him. He'd rather go to the dentist or even the tailor than have to answer a letter. But he wanted to stretch out on a long chair and finish his novel. He liked to read as much as he hated to write—and quite right, too—for he had a quick, if rough, appreciation of good but not too good fiction, liked books of more intrinsic importance even better, and his achievements as a letter-writer were atrocious. He could do with another breakfast, at least with a long cool drink and a snack, before long. His aunt's prattle worried him—he would not for the world have had her know that it did, for he loved her very much—and he loathed those dogs. He was proud of Aunt Hilda, but he was downright ashamed of John

Brown and Daniel Webster. Mrs. Van Vleck did not often ask John to carry them, but she might. She did sometimes, and she was getting terribly out of breath. And sometimes one or both of them escaped from the crook of her arm, and then it was Thorn for the chase. Obviously Aunt Hilda couldn't chase after the little devils, which made it as obvious that he'd have to. Thank the Lord, no one in Chicago would see him doing it, or need ever know that he had.

He wasn't going to leave Aunt Hilda in the lurch now or ever. She'd been as good as a mother to him always—better than most mothers; he loved her; she'd had a hell of a time; and John Thorn was no quitter. Hadn't he, out of chivalry that was no less fine because it was unconscious, come off here to this hole of a place with her, leaving the real estate business to flourish or perish without him for at least a year, just because his aunt wanted him and didn't want anyone else? But he cursed those darn dogs of hers and then some.

Thank goodness they were going on to Japan as soon as Mrs. Van Vleck had taken a squint or two more at Peking—next week or the week after. Japan might be as bad as this, but Thorn doubted it. It could not be worse.

Much as he disliked China, much as he missed the real estate business, he did not regret having come along with poor Aunt Hilda. A year or eighteen months was a lot of time to stay away from the business. But he'd work like twenty-two niggers to make up for it. And he had lots of time to do it in. He wasn't thirty till March, and his father was still going strong at seventy.

It was doing Aunt Hilda no end of good—that was good enough for him. She had perked up almost as

soon as they'd left New York—and the New York papers—behind them; and she'd gone on perking up ever since.

Paul Van Vleck's death had left his childless wife several millions, but it had bowed her head pretty low, and the woman was proud. Even prouder than the pride average of her sex and nation, she had not half suspected how proud she was until the bitterly humiliating disclosures of Van Vleck's death had struck her full in the face. John wondered how much she would have cared—about the other woman—if only it had been kept out of the New York papers. It had not been kept out of the New York papers. The widow held her head higher than ever, had laughed, full in New York's social limelight, at "silly old Paul! Who'd have thought it! But they are all like that!"—and packed an incredible number of trunks and announced that she was going to gratify her lifelong wish to have a look at the Orient. She was going, she said, partly because she saw no reason to wear black, under the circumstances, but felt it would be indecent not to there in New York for a man who, whatever else he had done, had left her the turn of ten millions. She was going more particularly to get a boat-load of Japanese servants. She was going to staff all three of her houses so. There were no darky servants worth having to be had any more—and you know what all the others are!

Van Vleck had made no provision for the other woman. He always had meant to, but he had had no thought that he might die before many years; he had let his multitude of other things crowd it out; and the will he had made soon after his marriage stood. Perhaps the other woman had saved something for herself and her children; she had had lavish chance

to, but Hilda Van Vleck hoped that she hadn't. That sort rarely does, Mrs. Van Vleck was glad to reflect.

When his aunt had asked Thorn if he would come along with her for a year or perhaps a bit longer, he had not hesitated for a moment. He knew that his chances of being the ultimate sole heir to the Van Vleck millions, unless Aunt Hilda spent them, which she was quite capable of doing, were about ninety-nine out of a hundred; but that had nothing to do with it. He loved his aunt; that had little more to do with it. He was not grateful to her for her half-life-time of kindness and indulgence to him. He saw no reason to be, for he knew perfectly well that she would not have been so unless she had wished to be and had enjoyed it. He had not fallen in with her plan out of gratitude. It had been sheer chivalry. He was terribly sorry for his aunt, he was ready to do any earthly thing he could to help her. He had his full share of the chivalry to women, especially towards a woman of one's own blood who is old and has had a bad knock, that, perhaps, is the most general characteristic and the finest of most American men.

They both knew that his coming with her was a pretty big sacrifice. He thought no better of himself for making it. But the woman's love of him welled fiercely at it. She gave no sign, but she registered an oath that nothing should induce her to spend more than half, or perhaps two-thirds, of her capital. And nothing should come between Jack and his heritage—unless he married to displease her. She did hope that John wouldn't do that; but she knew perfectly that he would, if he wished. She knew her nephew. She read him accurately, as the yearning heart of a childless woman often does read a young man whom she loves as a son. She knew that John would very much

like her to leave him her money, even went so far as to hope, but with perfect good nature, that she would not run through all of it; and knew that he'd not hesitate to say so, if she asked him or introduced the subject. She knew, too, that if she did not leave him her money, he wouldn't give a damn.

Mrs. Van Vleck was far from bored. Her eyes widened a little and a slight flush grew on her well-powdered cheeks. And for a longer time than John often remembered she did not speak, but stood almost directly above the Ch'ien Mên looking down on pictured Peking. If the pink-walled, yellow-roofed Palaces were the dominant note—a world in themselves—there was much else to halt the eye and tangle the breath.

The great blue canopy of the Temple of Heaven, turquoise-clear but deeper, flung its challenge of perpetual prayer up to the gentian-blue of the sky. Down in the Chinese City myriads of trees were burst in leaf and bloom, for the tiniest home had its tiny garden space, and every garden space at least one loved and tended tree—baby saplings some, veterans gnarled and twisted others, which looked centuries old, deformed and witch-like. Down on the busied streets blue-clad and gayer-clad humans, ponies, donkeys, mules—very many white mules, supercilious camels, rough tall-wheeled carts, wheelbarrows and chairs, pole-carried booths of itinerant cooks jostled each other in endless knotted streams between the open-front shops. A Manchu wedding procession made way for a funeral cortege; always in China Death has pride of place.

It was a gray city on the whole, but whose gray you did not see, except when you walked in it in the narrow streets; because its human throngs were so colorful and picturesque, because it was so splendidly

broken by great swaths of splendid color, because it was so dominated by a cloudless turquoise sky. The glorious silver pine of Chihli gleamed its magnificence here and there in the City, grew in splendid towering masses in glades and on hills beyond it. Beyond the Hata Mên the haunted tiers of the Fox Tower showed on the Tartar City Wall. The Temple of Agriculture, the Observatory where Kublai Khan counted the stars and which the Jesuits enriched with Western knowledge and instruments, the old pen-like cells of the Examination Halls, hundreds of temples—Lama, Imperial, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian—canals, bridges, courtyards, archways and *pai-fangs*, the shops in Lantern Street, roofs of a dozen hues made mosaic of the picture. And only the huddled discords of Legation Quarter were ugly; Europe in Asia—hideous but unashamed. The molten air quivered over towers and roofs. On the moats beyond the outer walls boatmen sang gruntingly as they poled. White oxen grazed on clover fields between lakes of mustard and seas of millet.

The day was beautiful, Peking was lovelier; the one spot on Earth where man has outrivaled Nature, prevailed.

"Isn't it cute!" Mrs. Van Vleck said.

CHAPTER II

"**W**AS Aunt Joan going to walk the whole fourteen miles?" Elizabeth wondered. "The whole length of Peking's outer Wall!"

Thorn knew that Aunt Hilda wasn't. She never had walked two miles in her life.

He saw the people coming towards them, gave them a glance and looked away. He instantly had spotted them for English, the woman and the girl and the two men who accompanied them. Except that he liked none of them, English people did not interest him. He didn't turn head or eyes when they and he and his aunt had come almost face to face. Mrs. Van Vleck looked—she always looked—but the strangers didn't hold her attention at all.

But the Duchess halted abruptly, and after a quick, eager look, demanded of the American woman, "Can you tell me the time?"

Mrs. Van Vleck looked at her wrist, and did, but not too cordially. She had lived in Fifth Avenue too long and too supremely ever to unbend to strangers until she knew all about them. She never picked up with nobodies, or let them thrust their acquaintance upon her.

"What perfect dears!" The Duchess dangled a glove and chuckled when Daniel Webster snapped it away from her. "Didums. So he shall then if he wants it."

Hilda Van Vleck smiled in spite of herself. The other had touched Mrs. Van Vleck's weakness. And the woman looked and sounded right enough.

"You've still got the same dimple, Hilda! I thought it was you. Haven't changed much in thirty years. You wouldn't. I have. Haven't the remotest idea who I am, have you?"

Mrs. Van Vleck shook her head. There were not half a dozen people privileged to call her Hilda. But her sure and experienced social instinct now recognized this a woman of quality. "I'm afraid I don't," the New York woman said pleasantly.

"Do you remember the day you filled poor old Herr

Bremann's fiddle with castor oil? And what he said?"

Hilda Van Vleck's face softened beautifully.

"Joan! You *are* Joan Kent?"

"Of course I am. Worse for wear, no doubt, but I am Joan."

To his amazement, John Thorn saw his aunt's eyes fill with tears. What next! Never had he seen his aunt cry. He knew that she felt, felt excruciatingly at times. But it was not her way to show emotion. And now her face was quivering.

Then—the tall thin woman was hugging Mrs. Paul Van Vleck! And Aunt Hilda hugged and kissed her back—more than once. What next!

Next was two tiny Maltese dogs scampering wildly along the great Wall of Peking, racing each other perilously on its very outer edge. One really good spring there where the bricks of a parapet had crumbled and they might be down and out.

Thorn was perfectly willing that both John Brown and Daniel Webster should topple over and make an end in the lily-pads on the slime-covered moat.

But he remembered that that would not suit Mrs. Van Vleck in the least when she discontinued hugging and being hugged. Loyal to her in everything, he addressed himself to saving, if he could, the worthless lives of the fluffy white torments. No use to call them. They obeyed no one, least of all him. They knew he did not like them. They never failed to flaunt their contempt of him.

Someone whistled, a clear, imperative, confident note, but friendly.

Daniel Webster turned his head, John Brown cocked a fluted, feathered ear.

It had been a feminine whistle, sweeter than a man's. Neither of the men who had fallen back a space or

two, when the Duchess of Charnley had accosted Mrs. Van Vleck, could have whistled quite so lightly. Certainly neither Aunt Hilda nor her friend had achieved that whistle. They were engrossed completely with each other. Aunt Hilda had not even noticed Webster or Brown slide fatly out of her arms. And Aunt Hilda could not whistle.

It must have been the girl who had halted indifferently when the elder woman had paused. Yes, it had. For she whistled again and more sharply, less sweetness, more command in the long contralto note, and this time Thorn, watching, saw her do it.

John Thorn did not dislike girls. Being an American, he had been educated not to; and he had a quick eye for nice figures and pretty faces, an eye that was neither indifferent to nor uncritical of skirts and hats.

This girl did not attract him. She was not pretty; he thought her face dull and colorless and her clothes dull and ordinary. She was almost tiny and pale. You would never look at her twice in a crowd. Her eyes were hard, too, and cold. All of her looked cold. He liked a girl's eyes to talk. This girl's gray eyes were absolutely silent; indifferent sentinels of a silent personality, Thorn thought. As she stood there, idly waiting and not at all interested, she looked as bored as he was. That she did, did not touch his sympathy. He resented it. A girl had no business to look bored, or for that matter to be bored, ever. That was a masculine prerogative. And for all her in consequence, she looked arrogant—as if she neither saw nor considered anyone. No doubt that was just an inevitable expression of stupidity, but he disliked it. No one had any business to be stupid. Stupid

people ought to be sequestered, so that one never need come across them.

Hello! Those imp-faced devils were obeying her!

John Brown actually scampered back to her, and Daniel Webster, after a moment, much more slowly followed suit.

Elizabeth caught them up as they pawed at her skirt, held them out from her, one in each hand, and looked at them severely. Webster wagged a brief plummy tail, John Brown wagged a black tongue.

"You are naughty dogs. You are to behave yourselves. But you are rather darlings, aren't you!" The girl drew them close against her then, laughed a little as they wiggled in ecstasy, and cuffed Webster with no uncertain hand when he tried to lick her face. "Your manners are abominable. Has no one ever trained you? No nice dog is a public nuisance."

Thorn quite agreed, but he resented the English girl's frank criticism of his aunt's laxity or failure as a disciplinarian. If Aunt Hilda could have heard her costly pampered idols reprimanded briskly and called a public nuisance! And he disliked the girl's deep throaty voice. He disliked her accent, he very much disliked her pronunciation of "dog." Supercilious, both seemed to him. Why couldn't English folks speak English!

She could hold Webster and Brown indefinitely for all of him though. He had no wish to hold them, certainly he had no wish to chase them round and round the weed-and-shrub entangled, rut-imperilled Walls of Peking. He turned away, sauntered a few steps and looked unappreciatively at a long line of camels wending their slow ponderous way from distant Gobi to the Water Gate.

"Elizabeth!"

"Jack!"

The first excitement of their unexpected meeting had spent itself just enough to remind the two friends that they were not alone on the old Walls of Peking.

Thorn and Miss Kent—she still carrying John Brown and Daniel Webster—obeyed their aunts' summons, and the two young men followed Elizabeth.

Introductions were followed by explanations of relationships.

Thorn bowed carefully to the English girl; he did not intend that she should consider him, as well as his aunt's dogs, lacking in well-polished manners.

Miss Kent acknowledged the introduction without paying much attention to it. Thorn disliked her even more. He was too sharp-witted not to perceive that her quiet indifference was quite unassumed, and it rasped a social sensitiveness characteristic of such American men when they are abroad; too acute not to know how strangers appraised him, not thick-skinned enough not to care. Independent to a fault, there was no indifference in Thorn's make-up. His forbears for a hundred years or so had had to fight the elements, hostile Indians and the ups and downs of initial poverty and shifting fortune too strenuously and constantly to have been indifferent to anything or to have bequeathed to him indifference either to big things or to small. Nor had his thirty pushful years tended to engender indifference to others or to their opinions of him. Slothful indifference to the unspoken thoughts of others was no equipment for any man who was bent on making good *via* Chicago real estate deals. He saw that he did not count at all with that insignificant young English woman, and John Thorn did not like her for her insolence any

more than he liked her for her plain pale face, her deep dusky voice and her arrogant mispronunciation of the vowel in the word dog.

Miss Kent did not dislike Mr. Thorn—yet. She scarcely knew that they had met.

CHAPTER III

THE Hour-of-the-Cock was cooling the garden as Lee Wong came down the verandah steps and around the oleanders.

His padded shoes made little sound, but Feng Me-lah looked up from her embroidery-frame and greeted him with a smile.

"Your honorable father?" the Chinese asked gravely after he had bowed three times.

The Manchu girl dimpled teasingly. "Is in attendance, Lee Wong."

"Then I will wait for him," Lee told her with a frank laugh.

"*Yo shang yo fa*," Feng Me-lah said demurely.

"True words, O honorable maiden of jade and moonlight; there always *is* reward and punishment. For the inconvenience of not finding the eminent Feng Yu at home at this the immediate hour of my calling, it is my great reward that I find you here in the garden. What is the punishment that I must suffer? Give you it to me? It will not be punishment if it is your gift to this your servant."

"You go fine-clad, for a servant-one, Lee Wong."

"Because I wait upon Feng Yu," the Chinese said significantly. "But, too—for never shall it be that I speak to you so much as the shadow of not-truth

word—I have but now come from the Foreign Legation Quarter, and I stomach not that a Chinese gentleman is seen there poorly clad.”

“Chut! What do the Legations matter?”

“Much! And the matter of them to us grows daily more.”

“Chut!” Me-lah disallowed him again. “Well, born-before-I-was Lee Wong, of a sure-word your garments do your coin-pouch much praise to-day! A royal-born might envy you that jeweled robe. I do!”

“Would that you would permit me that I send a servant-one to you with it, and you condescend to walk upon it above the dew of the Hour-of-the-Dog, letting my best robe keep the dampness from your golden lilies.”

Feng Me-lah thrust a full-sized patterned foot a trifle nearer to Lee Wong. Her feet needed no Chinese Raleigh, they already were well protected from any wet beneath them, by the high heels set in the middle of her blue shoes’ thick soles.

“I have no golden lilies,” she reminded him, reminding him too of a barrier set between them centuries ago.

“I but used our usual word for a woman’s walk-withs, Feng Me-lah. I like best the not-deformed feet of your race. It grieves me that my sisters’ feet are bound. Often did my pearl mother’s lilies pain her. Long hours did I sit and chafe their cramp when in her own privacy she unbound and eased them. My sisters’ lilies should not have been bound, if the authority had been mine.”

“The authority was not yours, Lee Wong. Not even was it your honorable father’s, I think. You are slaved by your customs, as we by ours. Lee T’ing, because of rank and wealth, had not choice but to have

bound the baby feet of Lee Pi-min and Lee Lu. My father had no choice but to let mine grow even to ugliness, and I have no choice but to clump about on stilt-like clogs. Chinese ways for you, Manchu ways for us."

"The barriers are crumbling, Feng Me-lah."

"They but seem to, Lee Wong. For the babies sometimes a little now and then. Never for a Lee, never for a Feng."

Lee Wong sat down on the grass and laid his hand very lightly on her shoe—a great liberty and a caress.

"I will find a way, Me-lah."

The girl drew her foot away—slowly.

"Will you leave a message for my father? When she sends for him, it may be hours before she sees him. When she sees him, it may be more hours before she releases him."

"I must crave speech with him, eminent maiden. Be not inhospitable to the footsore slave who has come eleven long *li* to give Feng Yu what that distinguished graybeard bade the slave Lee Wong to find. I am content to wait. For what one craves most one is content to wait—if one must—even a life-time. There is a thing I crave more than I crave to have speech of distinguished Feng Yu. But for his return I am content to wait until this the Cock hour has gone and come again. If I may wait here at your feet, Feng Me-lah, I am content to wait many moons."

"You would hunger at your rice-time."

"My eyes would feed me with duck and ginger of heaven; they would fill me with the sacred yellow wine. Even now I am panged with hunger, parched with thirst. Let the beggar at your feet eat and drink, he implores you."

"You would not speak such free words to a maiden

of your own race, a Chinese maid, Lee Wong. Since you force me to stay here in the garden with you"—they both smiled a little. Lee Wong had no power to keep her there against her will—"conduct yourself toward me with the decorum and respect you would to a Chinese girl."

"Always that and more!" he promised fervently. "The pale ones of the Legation Quarter have a saying, 'When in Rome do as the Romans do.' They do not obey it ever. But it is wise words. Will not you give me Manchu privilege and customs here in your garden, even as the very honorable Feng Yu does? He permits that I come here freely even as a Manchu of his trust and kindred. It is homage that I give you always, jade-like Feng Me-lah. I speak to you as I find you, a Manchu maiden of the highest rank sitting at liberty in her unlocked garden; do it in respect, Me-lah, because I respect and like the equality even with himself that in his wisdom the Manchu accords his women. Even the Chinese women, here in the capital at least, are not over-guarded as they were. Why should not his wife be a man's companion in all things? A shut-in who hears only the gossip of her *kuei*, sees only its miniature mock-world, cannot companion a man in any worth-way. When we were children my sisters playing with me in our gardens wore bells on their jackets that it might be heard if they went beyond the narrow bounds prescribed them. Even then I thought it unfair. Now I see it barbaric. They could not climb a tree to peep over the wall at the road outside it, because their feet were bound and because their bells told what they were doing and called a slave-woman to come quickly running to pull them back and chide. I do not think that our women's feet first were bound that they might sway like lilies in a

breeze when they walked. The tale is pretty, but I do not believe it true. I believe that their feet were tortured and bound that they might be unable to escape. It is a mutilation of savagery. I am ashamed of it!"

"It has its advantages," the girl said stoutly. "And it has its disadvantages. Most things have the both, I think. I do not like your foreign adage, Lee Wong. Will you feed flesh to deer, grass to lions? I know nothing of the foreign-ones in the legations quarter you frequent. I am glad to know nothing. I should not like them, Lee Wong. I saw something of them in their own Europe when my father was our Minister there. I hope he may not be sent again. Should it be her pleasure that he is, I hope that I may not go with him. What is it that you do in the Legation Quarter, Lee Wong?"

"You know what I do there, Feng Me-lah."

"I do not know. I know what you seem to do. You teach Chinese to any foreigner of importance that will employ you. You of Chinese almost-prince rank masquerading as of the low teacher caste to the white aliens! It may cheat them, Lee Wong. It does not cheat me. What is it that you do in the legations quarter for my father? What is it that you do for her? For if you do it for him, as surely you do it for her. What is it, older-than-I-am Lee Wong?"

Lee Wong rose before he answered. For a moment he stood not looking at her, stood gazing across the peonies to where above the far bamboos the Western Hills blazed beryl and purple in the afternoon's sinking sun. When he looked back at her, Me-lah had risen too and stood facing him imperiously and coaxingly.

"If I tell you that, Feng Me-lah, if I even own that it is so, I betray a trust, Feng Me-lah. Would you have me do a disloyalty, Me-lah?"

"I would know what it is my father gives you to do in Legation Quarter. For I fear for him, Lee Wong."

"What will you give me if I tell you—tell you all?" Lee Wong whispered, going very close to Feng Me-lah as he spoke.

"Perhaps nothing. Probably nothing."

"You drive a hard bargain, Feng Me-lah."

"All women do that, Lee Wong; all who are young and with beauty—all of them whose feet are unbound. But I make no bargain with you, born-before-I-was Lee Wong. Because I love well my father I ask you a question. You will not answer. Loyal to him and to her! But churlish to me! Keep your secret, Lee Wong. The-old-one most honorable himself shall tell me. Or even I may move her to whisper me a hint-word of it some night when I have sung to her pleasing at her open casement when the night lantern is radiant, and the night-flowers belch out their heavy sweetness. She has her pliant moments! I am weary of staying here. I go to my own apartments now. Shall I send servants to attend you?"

"My loneliness and my grief that I have offended Feng Me-lah will attend me. Attendance enough for Lee Wong, most honorable maiden."

"Grieve not for that. Your politeness is excessive, Lee Wong. I hope that my father keep you not too long waiting."

Lee bent and picked up the embroidery-frame from the grass, and offered it to her.

The girl took it carelessly and turned towards the house.

The rich Manchus dwelt sumptuously, all of them, but few more sumptuously than Feng Yu.

His one-storied dwelling was many-roofed: a twisted chain of buildings and pavilions made one by the

verandah-corridors that linked them about a score of courtyards. The great sprawling house of houses was built on high foundations of gray stone, rough-hewn and cunningly carved. Every houselet and pavilion had its own deep, fantastic verandahs and its own up-turned bright-tiled roof. Every roof had its hanging lamp of cut and twisted soapstone, and on its eaves its guardian mythic lions, scorpions, deer, or sacred turtles; tiny unlikelike, conventional figures of great traditional power.

It looked a long cluster of gems not unworthy the great park-like walled garden that was its green and perfumed setting. The early peonies were in bud, the wistaria lightly tasseled festooned the garden's high walls with violet promise of purple to come, flinging its strong ropes through bamboos and tulip-trees.

Feng Me-lah went steadily on between the open-work trellis of vine-like peach trees and the little lake guarded by cranes and turtles of stone, passed the painted, lacquered swing that dangled on ropes of crimson and blue from the outspread arm of an old ash tree.

Lee Wong made no attempt to dissuade or to delay her.

But she turned and came back to him after she had gone a long pace and laughed relentingly as she came.

"I am glad you will not tell me, Lee Wong. I like best my friends when they are honorable. I knew you would not tell me. But I must learn it. I shall learn it. For the nothing you have told me, I will tell you something. The barriers are not down. They will not be let down while she lives. She but plays and tricks at letting them down. The barriers between Manchu and Chinese are kinder ones than are

the barriers between China and the Western interlopers. But never will she concede that the one great barrier between Chinese and Manchu be breached or lowered."

Lee's Chinese eyes flashed to hers in challenge and in promise.

"And," the girl answered them, "she is right."

"Stay a little longer here with me in the garden," Lee Wong entreated humbly as she turned away again. "I come not soon again, perhaps. It may be that I journey to Nanking. I may go to-morrow."

But Feng Me-lah would not stay.

CHAPTER IV

A PAINTLESS woman whose face was young though her years were many stood looking out of the pavilion's open window, her steel-sharp black eyes turned towards Peking. She could not see the city thirteen miles away, but her thought was there, and her thought was troubled.

Her graceful gown of gray was severely plain, not costly except for the green buttons of jade that fastened it from above her right shoulder to her straight-hanging robe's hem. She was scarcely five feet high, for she did not wear her Manchu shoes with their six-inch-high heels, but soft stocking-like shoes of silk. Except for the four nail-protectors that flashed with many gems, her tiny hands were bare. They were very lovely hands, eloquent of centuries of exquisite care, smooth and supple as a girl's, but full of character and personality; perhaps the chief beauty, and certainly the best preserved, of a body that had several.

Nearer seventy than sixty, her abundant black hair was neither dyed nor gray. She wore it simply parted above her strongly molded brow and twisted in a coil that was half hidden and wholly dwarfed by the flaring head-dress of black satin that was no blacker, no smoother or glossier than her hair—hair and satin so alike that only a careful eye could detect which was which.

Lilies floating lazily on the marble-edged lake lifted burning chalices of reds, rose, amber and orange from the cool green of their wide flat leaves. Tea-houses, pagodas and temples gleamed among bamboos and seas of iris, and perched on the hills. Green and silver water lapped the carved marble terraces of the countless palaces. High-born babies toddled in a dozen courtyards, gurgling down to the tiny dwarf-trees, reaching up covetous dimpled hands to the roses, thrusting their fat arms through clematis and fern fronds, clutching blossoms and buds, filching their sweetness, incensing too the flowers and foliage with their own human sweetness, burnishing again with tiny satin shoes the burnished mosaics they trod. Bridges of twenty designs each lovelier than the other spanned canals and lakelets. Arches of lacquer and porcelain sprang from foundations of jasper and jade, and dripped wistarias and columbines. Eunuchs and mandarins, slaves and banner-men bent on Imperial business or palace service, threaded their way through avenues of oleanders, tasseled laburnums and northern aloes, or strolled in talk along lanes twisting through ordered tangles of violets, verbenas and harp-flowers. Iris of every color and shade was everywhere. A palace of palaces more sumptuous than the West has seen or dreamed, the supreme garden of gardens!

But she kept her sight resolutely from flowers and

terraces lest, bathing her state-wearied eyes in the beauty she loved, her mind should wander from the tangled threads of statecraft which needed her care to-day more intensely than they had before in all the half-century during which statecraft sore and exigent had been her tyrant and her plague, great mistress of statecraft though she was.

Age had not withered her, trouble had not bent her. Her adamant will had kept her young and unbowed; an intensely womanly woman doomed to play a man's part as well as her woman's own, lured always by laughter and song, warm-hearted, sweet-souled at core, her brain as strong, as exquisitely equipped, as sternly trained as any man's, the most libeled woman in all history.

Had she many friends or none? She did not know.

Her heart ached for friendship and loyalty, as in her radiant youth it had ached for love—and never had ceased to ache. But she did not know if of all who served her there was one whom she could trust.

Let it go! she reflected grimly. She could trust herself. China could trust her—its mistress and servant—never to betray, never to forget. That was enough. If she could not trust, she could rule. Heartache was nothing. Duty and patriotism were everything. If she could not trust men she could use them. She could shuffle men and events as one can shuffle cards, and her tiny hands were as dexterous as they were beautiful. She could shuffle her cards to her own liking. She knew that she could play her cards unfailingly well.

She knew what China needed. She knew to a hair's breadth, to a grain's weight where China's welfare lay—in great things and small.

If only she could live long enough, and if she could but gage the encroaching peoples, their persistence and power, accurately!

Those two were the rub! She might die before her task was done, before she had found and made the man whom she could trust in succeeding her to serve China as she did, to guide and protect China as she. She must live many years yet, swim many whirlpools, brave many tempests. No weariness, no woman's weakness must scotch her. Rest was not for her.

The Westerns might beat her yet.

The woman feared neither chicanery nor antagonistic power of the East. What she understood she could overcome or circumvent. And her knowing and understanding of the East were sure.

But she did not know or understand the Westerns. Whom could she trust to translate aright to her the Westerns? It was not the Occident she feared, but her own ignorance of the Occidentals who pushed closer every day. Always she had disliked them. The more she saw and learned the more grew her dislike.

She must see more of them face to face. There was no other way, no other safe way and sure. She must let down the barriers, open the loop-holes—for a time. Only for a time! The gods must grant her that. She must let the foreigners into her very presence more and more, that she might study and search, and wield them! She must even beckon them, the foremost men among them; welcome to her throne room—or to some outer semblance of it—men who did not know how to behave in a throne room, or in a royal presence.

She must let some of their women in also—a little. That galled most!

What was doing in Peking now? What was hatching and arming in London, in Washington, in Paris, in Berlin?

Why did not Feng Yu come?

At last, as a thirst-maddened toper too long abstinent turns to his stimulant and gulps it, she looked down at the pink, crimson and amber sea of begonias, growing about the pavilion with their leaves of gray and jade foaming among them, looked at a sheltered plinth of ivory and cornelian cut with the gold name-characters of one she had loved, looked at the cinnamon and sandalwood tea-house, where best she liked to sip her peach-tea and whisper to her whispering table-lute, looked at the gardens' wealth of loveliness, clumps and fields of white narcissi, lemon and orange tulips, looked at the palace's curved gleaming roofs, looked at the gray-green and violet hills, looked with kindling face and brooding eyes at the great spirit-wall of turquoise and jade she herself had built. Its cost would have bought China a navy. But T'zū Hsi did not gulp the beauty she looked at at last. She drank it slowly, washing her very soul in it, refreshing her troubled, anxious mind, worshiping it, and in her worship of it worshiping what it symbolized: China.

A turquoise bird skimmed from the purpling wistarias that flung intricate ropes of loveliness from archways and roofs, poured tumbled cascades of green and amethyst down gray crevices.

The jeweled kingfisher flew so close to her as it went that she might have touched it. If she had, the bird would not have resented the soft touch of the Imperial hand. This woman could call the birds to her, could keep them on her finger while she would. They came to her magic, they trusted it.

The woman made no motion, her hands hung idle

at her sides until the bird was out of sight. Then she gestured sadly towards it as it flew Pekingward, or perhaps her gesture was to Peking.

She turned from the window, left her watching of her near garden-nook and wide garden reaches, left her brooding, and turned back to her gods, smiling oddly as she gazed at them slowly one by one.

The indescribable room can scarcely be hinted.

A great Buddha of beaten gold drowsing on his silver throne blinked lazily through soft spirals of ever-burning, thick-scented incense. Boy-tall candlesticks of solid gold flashed rubies, gleamed with great pearls. The crimson candles were lit. The altar vases, enamel, lacquer, ivory, porcelain and bronze, were packed with blazing flowers; every petal was a jewel or jewels, every leaf gold, silver or jade. The smaller gods and godlings stretched from the altar around the room and back to the altar again. Some were painted on silk, some were carved, some were molded. All were very beautiful, high achievements of master artists of a highly artistic people. A great censer of carved and of embroidered gold stood at Buddha's feet, to catch the ashes that fell as the prayer-tapers burned. Each of the lesser gods had its small censer of silver or lead or precious stone.

Here and there characters of prayer or admonition were cut in panels of ebony, teak and mahogany.

Nothing in the not large, exquisite room—exquisite in shape, exquisite in furnishings—was more beautiful than the beautiful carpet of orange silk—unless the windows were.

The ceiling was frescoed with vines and flowers so wonderfully drawn that they seemed to hang down, so wonderfully colored that they seemed to perfume again the perfumed room. Costly lanterns, whose long

tassels were jewels, hung like odd-shaped pendant flowers from the ceiling.

Except in the huts of the poor and buildings of trade, utilitarian industries, and storage, Chinese windows are pictures and poems. A volume could not describe them, nor could any cold Western pen, or Western instrument except only Kreisler's violin.

Each of the eight windows was individual in shape and in size. One was low and wide, one a mere slit between the gods of Industry and of Rain. One was round, one a triangle, another a perfect oval, another oblong, one square. Each was latticed with some precious wood cut in motifs of bamboo or citron, snakes, harebells or a maze of parallelograms. All were paned with the pearly, iridescent film that the Chinese pound and coax out of delicate shells.

Because of the translucent shell-panes the room was dim; a place of half-light and meditation. There was scant provision for human occupation, no invitation to human intercourse. A low divan of painted ivory lay humbly against one wall. The only stool was of malachite. Neither was cushioned or quilted.

For this was the private oratory of T'zŭ Hsi, in the Summer Palace, a palace still undefiled.

She stood a long time before Kwan Yin-ko. The woman's hands were folded on her bosom. The goddess's upheld ivory hands were pointed together in blessing and prayer.

"Hearer-of-cries," the woman murmured softly and bent her head. She was weeping softly.

T'zŭ Hsi went out slowly, walking confidently, and her face was calm as she went leaving the gods alone in their jeweled room.

The water-clocks had not dripped a quarter of an hour's tears away when the Empress was laughing with

her ladies on the lake as her standing oarsmen plied her ivory boat across the gold and emerald water.

But Feng Yu had not come yet.

CHAPTER V

MEET for the first time someone to whom you take a strong, immediate dislike and it's fairly safe to wager you'll keep on meeting, turn which way you will; provided only that you know even a few people in common.

Mr. Thorn of Chicago and Miss Kent of several English places kept on meeting. He had his letters of introduction, the Duchess, Elizabeth's aunt, needed none; and all the Legations Colony live on each others' verandahs. They have to, or stagnate.

The more they saw of each other, the less they liked. Propinquity worked for something very like enmity. He grated on her, she exasperated him. He offended her taste (or what she thought was her taste); she wounded his pride. Thorn was not used to having girls avoid him, or openly show that they preferred no company at all to his.

Two things made the avoidance of each other that both wished doubly difficult—two facts quite aside from the fact that everybody had to know everybody else, and see a good deal of them into the bargain, in the narrowly circumscribed society of Westerns in Peking.

In the first place everyone else in one way or another was interested, at least flippantly, in China and the Chinese. Lady Elsie was collecting mutton-fat jades. It was Mrs. Morgan's burning ambition to penetrate

into the Forbidden City, to be received quite *en famille* there, if possible—and she spent most of her time and talk and all her energy in plotting and scheming to bring it about. There were but a poor twenty-four hours in Mrs. Morgan's day and but seven days in her week, but neither her energy nor her talkativeness had any limit. The Ministers and their satellites were absorbed in the international doings and probabilities of the Chinese Court. Sir Henry was writing a book—about China of course. Several others were writing books. A Frenchman who looked interesting could think or speak about nothing but Eastern art. Three men looked attractive, but were not—because they were going to Teheran by the overland route and were deaf, dumb and dead to all else. Half a dozen others of the not diplomatically engaged were obsessed in eating in every native restaurant in Peking, and temporarily were lost to other pursuits or interests. A dozen more were crazed over learning Chinese games, and had no doubt that they would be proficient in them all before long. They played card-dominos in the morning, Mah Jong all afternoon, Earth and Fairyland from dinner to bedtime, and fell asleep playing Chinese Patience in bed. Little as they knew about China, and most of them knew very little indeed, China tinged everything they did, almost everything that they thought. A honeymoon couple were engrossed in each other. A second honeymoon pair were as engrossed more regrettably, respectively in a good-looking bachelor and a not too circumspect widow. And so on and so on—it left Thorn and Elizabeth to amuse each other or to dispense with all easy companionship. They both wished to dispense. They could not.

For in the second place, and far more seriously for

the discomfort of Elizabeth and Thorn, their aunts were inseparable; neglected their niece and nephew callously, but at the same time coerced them into constant companionship.

At the convent in Paris Joan Kent and Hilda Thorn had loved each other more deeply than often two girls do. For three years there they had been inseparable. They had parted with tears and the usual vows. The tears had dried quickly and the vows had been broken. Once-a-week letters slacked first to once-a-months, then to once-a-year, and ceased. Unlike most New York women of wealth, Mrs. Van Vleck never had gone to England. Paul Van Vleck had thought Hot Springs, San Francisco and the Adirondacks travel enough for him and his. A trip to America, even to Canada, never had entered the Duchess' head. But they had not forgotten each other. To take up an old friendship after years, almost a crowded lifetime of separation and silence, can't be done, as a rule. But there are a few rare friendships, intrinsic affections, that can stand even that test. Theirs had. They took up in their aging maturity the congeniality of their girlhood just where the Atlantic had breached it—took it up with all its long-ago savor. Time and distance that had seemed to snap it, merely had veiled it. Aunt Hilda delayed journeying on to Japan, then renounced it. Thorn thought grimly, and so did Elizabeth, that if Mrs. Van Vleck had not, the Duchess would have thrown China to the winds and gone too, and taken Elizabeth with her.

The two old friends were inseparable again. John and Elizabeth could go hang for all their aunts cared, so it seemed. And a good deal of the time Thorn and Elizabeth did.

The day they went to the soapstone bazaar, near

the Lama Temple, the mutual dislike that had smoldered for weeks broke into open flame.

Both were disgruntled at the errand they were on, and by the road it had brought them. Neither wished to buy carved soapstone. Each uncoerced could have spent the hot morning hours more congenially and very much more comfortably. But the aunts had elected to buy soapstones, to buy them to-day, and to buy them only in one particular shop that someone, who knew very little about it, or about anything else Chinese, had vaunted as the super-excellent mart of these twisted, grotesque specimens of Chinese handicraft and artistry. Elizabeth had come in her aunt's wake because it was too hot to argue or resist. Thorn had come because of his affectionate habit of yielding to his aunt.

The day was torrid, the way had proved sordid and unpleasantly odorous. Had they anticipated quite how uncomfortable the jaunt would prove, possibly Thorn would not have come, certainly Elizabeth would not.

A Chinese hag had cursed them threateningly until Lee Wong had driven her off; a mendicant leper had jostled and importuned them with a persistent display of his piteous, loathsome malady. Urchins embarrassingly nude and abominably dirty had harassed and mocked them. A passing donkey had attempted to browse the flowers on Miss Kent's hat. A dozen verminous mongrel curs had snarled and snapped at their disconcerted heels. No Chinese dog of mongrel breed—few others either—likes the scent of Western flesh. John Thorn was neither cowardly nor nervous but he did shrink from being bitten by a Chinese dog. Elizabeth was anxious for her stockings. Some of the streets were so narrow and so dense with busily moving Chinese that more than once they had to choose be-

tween rubbing shoulders with each other or with blue-clads who apparently had little use for bathtubs and undoubtedly lived on onions and over-ripe fish. The garbage-hidden ruts were frequent and so deep that sprained ankles seemed foregone conclusions.

A portly Chinese, an itinerant vendor of hot and fragrant vermicelli and fish-cakes, avoiding a particularly precipitous hole in the road, lurched heavily against Miss Kent, lost the contents of a basin of soy and vermicelli on her crisp white skirt, and demanded payment for his scattered ware. Thorn intervened hotly and Elizabeth went precariously on; it seemed useless, if not even dangerous, to turn back without the numbered protection of the others. The others were some distance in advance by now, and had not noticed their delay or the small incident that had caused it. Thorn succeeded in routing the itinerant cook who went off laughing. Thorn did not laugh—there were trickles of soy on him too! But he shrugged and hurried after Miss Kent. Couldn't risk her being mobbed in a crowd of yellow devils like this—Chinese who seemed about equally disposed to laugh or to assault.

And Thorn reached her just in time to hear her say bitterly under her breath, "Oh, to be in England!"

"You think a heap of that little island of yours, don't you?" Thorn asked in a tone that said that he did not.

"You would not care for it," the English girl retorted coldly.

"I suppose not," the man agreed—not too politely, but, for that matter, neither had Miss Kent's words and what they implied been strictly courteous.

Elizabeth walked on haughtily. Thorn lagged at her side.

"Well," he continued teasingly after a silence that bristled, "couldn't think much less of it than I do of this, though."

Elizabeth ignored that, which was what it deserved. Her silence infuriated him. It always did.

"I dare say you think I'd like little Great Britain if I did see it, don't you?"

"No. And I hope not," Elizabeth said smoothly.

Thorn chuckled. "You *are* mad!"

"Indeed, I never have considered myself insane," she said indifferently.

"Words mean different things to you and me, Miss Kent."

"Quite. Everything does."

He laughed again. "I wonder what you'd think of our country, how you'd like it, if you went there."

"I don't. I know."

Thorn bit back a bitter and, he believed, brilliant rudeness. He had drawn her fire. She shouldn't draw his. She wasn't worth it. And he'd had no business to tease her quite so hard—not even an English girl who was as stuck up as she was plain and dull.

They walked on in silence, he just close enough behind not to have quite deserted her. Why the dickens didn't Morrison take her off his hands? It was up to the Englishman to do it. And they got on well enough, he'd noticed.

Their silence grew oppressive—to the man. And, too, his conscience was pricking. Hang it all, a fellow'd no business to goad any girl the way he had this girl. To do her justice, she never thrust herself upon him. It was all the fault of those blessed old women, his aunt and hers. The girl didn't like slouching along here with him any more than he did with her, perhaps.

He rather suspected she did not. Confound it all, he'd been downright rude. He was ashamed of himself for that. And he was vexed that the girl might think—that he'd given her cause to think—that his manners didn't come up to the Vere de Vere mark. Hang it all, he'd make amends.

He did it nobly, if not brilliantly, remarking genially as he fell into step beside Elizabeth, "Confoundedly hot."

Miss Kent made no reply.

Thorn persisted. "What sort of weather do you have in England?"

"All sorts."

"Well—so do we sometimes."

If Miss Kent felt any interest in American weathers, she evinced none.

Conversation flagged. It ceased.

He'd done his damndest. Icicles were all well enough in their place—hanging down on the edge of a barn; but he wasn't going to waste his breath talking to any icicle, or trying to make friends with one; certainly not with an icicle made in England.

Silence continued.

The girl did not care, but the man did. His pride was pricked.

In China Western eyes get a habit of looking at feet; Chinese footgear makes one, probably.

Thorn looked down at Elizabeth's feet as they picked their way in silence along the narrow gutter-edged street that grew more and more heaped with garbage and perilous with ruts.

Why did English girls wear shoes like that? Thick, ugly things you'd think even an English girl would know better than to wear. But this English girl's feet were small. Stout English walking shoes did

their best, but they could not make those feet of hers look anything but small. He had heard that all English women had big feet. It vexed him that Elizabeth Kent's were not.

Studying them gloomily, he saw suddenly that Miss Kent's feet were in imminent peril—at least her shoes were.

He caught her, lightly enough, by her arm.

"Hold up, you'll go splash into that puddle, Miss Lizzie."

Elizabeth's arm shrank from his fingers instantly. She turned and looked at him. Never rosy, her face was pallid with anger—not at his touch which she had brushed aside as impersonally, had regarded as impersonally, as she would a fly's.

"To my friends, Mr. Thorn, I am Elizabeth; to strangers and to mere chance acquaintances I am Miss Kent."

"But Elizabeth is a ridiculous name for a scrap of a girl like you. They shouldn't have called you Elizabeth."

Elizabeth Kent looked at Thorn attentively as a naturalist might at an interesting moth or beetle. Then she laughed lightly.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I thought you insolent, but I see that you are only ignorant and uncouth."

Thorn's face flamed.

Before he could make any retort, she had moved away swiftly and lightly, and deliberately joined Lee Wong and Lord Arthur Ridley.

Angry as he was at her and at himself, he realized, and it amazed him, that the girl was not half as plain as he had thought. The little demon had looked almost pretty; yes, almost quite lovely, for a moment.

The green and gold flecks had sparkled like bits of stars in those big gray eyes, and her uptilted chin—and that impudent red mouth too, for the matter of that—had looked good enough for a man to kiss—an English man to kiss, and to want to kiss again when he had.

He was *not* an English man, thank God!

CHAPTER VI

WHY Mrs. Van Vleck and the Duchess took a sudden fancy to learn Chinese neither of them possibly could have told you.

"May as well pick it up," Hilda Van Vleck explained. "And it will be fun to go to school together again—just for an hour two or three times a week, won't it, Jo?"

The Duchess nodded. "Never too late to learn," she added cautiously, "and it might come in useful; you never know."

Why he accepted them as pupils and put up with their adamant incapacity week after week Lee Wong could have told you readily. He did not. Lee Wong told no one, not even Feng Me-lah. But Feng Me-lah knew without being told.

The Legations were greatly amused. It takes very little to amuse the West in the East. Trifles much lighter than air serve the Westerns as screamingly funny in the Orient. Scholarly diplomats who had studied Chinese languages earnestly for more than half their lifetime lifted their eyebrows discreetly and shrugged thin shoulders. But no one else thought or found it half as funny as Mr. Lee Wong did. Only

Lee Wong knew half how absurd it was, or a quarter how futile—for them. Elizabeth thought it silly. Thorn thought it darned nonsense. A girl or two—they were “white” but not Anglo-Saxon—wondered if Miss Kent had not contrived it; Lee Wong was undeniably handsome. “The Chink has eyes. Those slant-eyes of his, you take it from me, see how attractive Miss Kent is as clearly as you and I do,” one callous attaché said to another, and the other agreed. And Lee Wong did. He saw the distinction and charm of Elizabeth Kent and read, as Thorn did not (or resented it if he did), on her delicate face that something finer and lovelier than physical beauty—race. Also, though many others did not, Lee Wong thought Elizabeth beautiful.

“Her face,” he told Feng Me-lah, “is an alabaster flower in moonlight, her eyes are green cornelian pools.”

Feng Me-lah took little interest in the Legations women, but she determined to look well at Miss Kent, if opportunity served.

“Is it worth the time you spend, the boredom you endure?” Feng Yu asked. He did not refer to the face of Elizabeth Kent, but to the teaching Chinese to the Duchess of Charnley and the Duchess’ American friend, Mrs. Van Vleck.

Lee Wong understood to what Feng referred.

“It may prove so—richly worth my hours, and the weariness of my soul, venerable, deeply respected Feng Yu. I give both gladly. The English lady is the wife of one who was a Cabinet Minister, and she is in his confidence. She is careful and tight of her lips. But her heart is warm to her American friend. To the lady Van Vleck the English Duchess—one discloses her mind, if she does to anyone. The American

lady is not careful, her lips are loose. I continue their lessons with attention and eagerness."

"Have they minds?" Feng Me-lah asked, looking up idly from the silk she was painting.

"They have minds," Lee Wong told her. "Their minds are not adapted to the study of Chinese."

"Do you like them?" Me-lah asked as idly as she had questioned before.

"I like the Duchess-one, distinguished maiden. I do not dislike the American lady. They did not interest me at first; they do now. Beneath their bad manners and entire lack of Chinese culture they have much worth and are greatly kind."

"What do they look like?" the Manchu girl persisted.

Lee Wong smiled. "There is no similarity in their appearance, noble Feng Me-lah. The English Duchess looks in figure something like a tall straight tree that has neither branches nor leaves. And her countenance is in a slight degree equine. She has a stern face and carries herself with decorum, but her heart is warm. I think she has not known trouble. The American lady looks like her own daughter, and wears festival garments and much jewels every day. She wears powders on her face. She irons her hair with hot prongs of steel to make it shape like waves of the sea. The Duchess-one does neither of those. My American pupil is plump like a pigeon. Her face is not unlike an ornamented English-make pudding. She laughs much. She has known heavy sorrow. She is proud and brave. But under her sea-wave hair and her laughs, often her heart is sad in her corsets. She wears much corsets and sets her figure to them, not them to it. The English Duchess wears little corsets, she does not require them."

Feng Me-lah asked nothing more. She did not find the two foreign ladies of any interest.

But Lee Wong's description of each might have been less accurate.

"Yes, distinguished maiden," he added reflectively, "I like them both. But most of many I meet in Legation Quarter I like a Mr. John Thorn who is a nephew to the American lady. But he does not like me."

"Why do you like him?" Feng Yu asked.

"Because, Ta Jen, I respect and trust him. He's honest and strong. His friendship would be a good possession in crisis, trouble or danger."

"Why does he not like you, Lee Wong?" the girl demanded.

"Because I am Chinese," Lee Wong said gravely. "And," he laughed, "perhaps also because he does not know me."

"Are they betrothed, the honest nephew and beautiful niece of your two new pupils?"

The girl glanced up from her painting and saw his lips twitch. And his slant eyes danced.

"Not at present," Lee Wong answered darkly.

Feng Yu had documents to study before he took them to his mistress on the morrow. He rose, excusing himself, and went to his study.

Lee Wong made no motion to follow, though always he was welcome in the *shu-chia* of Feng Yu.

Feng Me-lah painted steadily on; if she was not forgetful of everything else but the silk she was painting, she appeared to be.

Lee Wong was content. The garden was exquisite. He was well content to sit here with the flowers and watch the riant girlish face and the wee jeweled hands of Feng Me-lah.

But after a long time he spoke.

"I have written a poem."

"So." The girl dimpled.

But Lee Wong did not dislike to have Feng Me-lah tease him. Even her mockery he found sweet. And she gave it him often.

He drew out a silk and unrolled it.

"Will you condescend to criticize my poem?" he asked.

Manchu Me-lah pouted delicately, but she did not forbid him to read.

Chinese Lee Wong did not dislike to see Feng Me-lah pout. When Feng Me-lah pouted her little mouth looked like the twirled bud of a pomegranate flower, he thought. Possibly Feng Me-lah thought so too.

He waited a little longer—to watch her the longer. His verses could wait, but the loveliest expressions of her delicate provocative face were fleeting; they came and went like moonlight on rippled water.

Perhaps she would bid him begin.

Feng Me-lah did not, she painted on sturdily. Presently she yawned very prettily.

Lee Wong smiled sagely and began to read.

Lee read very well. Some poets do, and he came of a race most of whose sash-wearers are musicians of thoughts and words.

Before many minutes Feng Me-lah turned her face away—she felt that it was kindling. There was no need that Lee Wong should see that, nor any propriety.

But love can see in the dark. Love can see in the dark as well as owls can—better perhaps. Lee Wong's voice grew softer, but it did not falter.

He read the last couplet, his eyes on her face as

he read, and reading saw a silver drop fall on the silk Feng Me-lah no longer was painting.

Lee Wong's heart throbbed hotly.

And he read the last couplet again, very softly but clearly.

The girl began painting very quickly.

"It is not a poor poem, Lee Wong," she said rather coolly. "I like the first couplets."

Lee Wong saw that she was signing her finished picture. Before she knew that he did he had risen and looked down at her silk.

"Feng Me-lah!" he cried.

She had brushed on her picture of jasmine and orioles, not the characters of her name but of his. And Lee Wong knew that Feng Me-lah did not know that she had—knew that her hand had obeyed her heart, unknown to her will.

His cry leapt to her.

She dropped her eyes, to veil them from his, and saw what she had brushed.

Lee Wong put his hand to her sleeve. She snatched it away, jumping up, turned from him and ran towards the house, tearing and crumpling the paint-wet silk as she went.

Lee Wong was greatly content. His heart throbbed in triumph tenderly.

He would be very patient. The flower of her maidenhood should feel no rude breath from him. He would wait. He would wait long and with patience.

And there was Feng Yu to placate and convince. Feng Yu would be of great difficulty. Perhaps Lee T'ing his own honorable father would be more difficult still.

But the heart of Lee Wong danced, and his soul sang.

CHAPTER VII

IF you make up your mind to dislike me, and I make up mine to dislike you, the chances are that we'll both succeed. Their common dislike of China and the Chinese did not make in the least for harmony, or tolerance even, between John Thorn and Elizabeth Kent. Each felt, if they did not go so far as to think, that the other took an unjustifiable liberty in sharing the prejudice. Because she had heard Thorn say at dinner the night before how much he disliked "the fellow" and how abominable it was that white women had anything to do with Chinks, Miss Kent was almost gracious to Mr. Lee Wong the day of the picnic, and for no other reason at all.

Being a man, Thorn was not quite so petty as all that. His reason for devoting himself as genially as he could to Miss Feng was a manlier reason. Aunt Hilda had commanded him to do it, and had begged it almost with tears in her eyes.

"I say," he had expostulated indignantly at first. "That order's a bit too tall for yours truly, Aunt Hilda."

But when she had told him her reason, and pleaded it coaxingly, John yielded, but not enthusiastically.

"Oh, all right then," he laughed. His laugh was both embarrassed and grudging.

But Mrs. Van Vleck did not mind that. So long as she got her own way, it rarely troubled her that she got it with a narrow margin of another's willingness.

She reached up on the tip of her toes, and patted John on his face.

"Good little Jackie," she said.

"I hope it rains like fury," Thorn protested meanly—which displayed his entire ignorance of which months it respectively rained and did not rain in and about Peking. "It's a fool idea this white and yellow picnic."

"Well, perhaps it is," the aunt admitted. "But mind you be good. And do you know, Jack, I have a shrewd suspicion that things aren't as shipshape as they look here in Peking."

"Who says they look shipshape? I don't."

Mrs. Van Vleck paid no manner of attention to her nephew's interruption. They were not formal people, nor were they on formal terms. They often interrupted each other gaily, and the other always took it as a matter of course.

"I believe there is something brewing, or that the Legations—Ministers and attachés and things—think there is. I believe they are afraid into the bargain, and that they are playing up to every Chinese of importance they can, and playing up hard."

"Your friend the Duchess told you anything?"

"Of what's in the air? Mercy me, no. And I don't s'pose she knows. It wasn't meant to be a white and yellow, as you call it, picnic in the first place. I know that much. But one of the Ministers put his finger in and his foot down, too, and told his wife to ask Li this and Hing the other to come along——"

"And missus did——"

"And missus did. Dear me, these Legation women have to do a lot of things they may or mayn't like, off here in China. That's what one of the poor old Ministers did, to my knowledge, Jack, and half a

dozen of the others followed suit. It wouldn't surprise me to learn they all did."

"The whole job lot?"

"Whole job lot of them. And it's my idea that the word has been passed around to treat them well, if they do come."

"They'll come all right."

"Not so sure. The Chinese stand off a good deal, Lady Mary says. Hope they do—come, I mean. If you are having a mixed party, the more mix the better. That's my experience."

Thorn looked doubtful. But he did not contradict. As an experienced hostess Mrs. Van Vleck was past mistress, and her nephew knew it.

"Do you know what I think, Jackie?"

Thorn did not, but he did not say so; he knew it to be unnecessary. Aunt Hilda would inform him on the point without prompting, and at once.

"I think there's going to be a mutiny, and that the Legations are trying to starve it off mighty hard."

"What sort of a mutiny?" Thorn was amused.

"Remember Cawnpore!" she whispered tragically. "All over again."

"Pooh—that was a long time ago. And it was in India. Cawnpore's part of India."

"Well, perhaps it is," the aunt conceded skeptically. "But what of it? India and China're all one."

Essentially they might be for all he knew or cared, so again he did not contradict his aunt. But Thorn suddenly saw a very desirable loophole in Cawnpore, and instantly seized it to his own desire and possible advantage.

"Look here, Auntie Hilda, if there is going to be that sort of kick-up in little old Peking, blood-drinking, women sawed in two and all that sort of gory odd-

ments, and," the scamp added, "you almost always are right, we'd better clear out, make tracks and make 'em quick."

"We won't. I'd just love to see a bit of history in the making. Wouldn't you?"

"Not on your tintype. Not that sort of history. Flow of blood never tickled me much; I can see all of it I fancy seeing at the Stock Yards any old time."

"What's more," Mrs. Van Vleck added regretfully, "Jo wouldn't come along; not if I know her. She's here for a year. She's said so all along. And when Jo Kent says she's here for a solid year, she is. Ten Mutinies wouldn't shift her; not till she liked to go."

"She'd like to go all right, if the Cawnpore act rang up," John said with bitter emphasis. He had not intended that the Duchess of Charnley (and her niece) should come along. It was just about the last thing he wished. He'd had all the China he required for the present, but he'd as lief stick on here in Peking as go away from it anywhere escorted by the English duchess—and her niece.

He knew that if Aunt Hilda wouldn't budge, she wouldn't. Apparently she emphatically would not. And that was the end of that.

Six English duchesses (if England ran to six) and then some couldn't be any more determined than Aunt Hilda could.

As for her new Cawnpore, that was all bunkum. Aunt Hilda was like that pretty often. All women were.

This picnic of theirs would be ague and yellow fever. But what of that? He had come all the way to China, to please his aunt, with more of self-sacrifice than she'd ever suspect. He had done it because she wished it,

and he wasn't going to shirk the rotten old picnic if it pleased Aunt Hilda, or shows far worse than that.

This was her party and he wasn't going to spoil it. And he'd be "good" all right at the precious picnic; good as pie. He'd beau the Chinese girls all she liked. But—darn Paul Van Vleck!

Greatly to his credit, for about everything that could conspired to jar him from start to finish, Thorn kept his word. He was even better than the succulent time-hallowed staple of his national diet—home-made pie. It is no exaggeration to state that he was as good as peaches and cream when both are at their delicious best.

All of it was bad enough; perhaps the start was worst of all.

Even British legs could not have dreamed of walking, for pleasure not penance, from Legation Quarter more than half-way to the Western Hills. Carriages, horses nor rickshaws were practicable or available. The first two were few in Peking, there were almost no rickshaws, and the ways the picnickers went were not practical for such means of progress. They were carried.

Nothing in his Eastern exile exasperated John Thorn more than being carried. It humiliated him almost beyond heroic endurance. Why a man accustomed to be hurled up and down the elevator shafts of the Rookery and a score of Chicago's higher skyscrapers should revolt at palanquins, seems a bit inexplicable; but it was so. Thorn never got into a chair or got out of one without feeling several sorts of fool. And every moment he was in one he felt just that way about it. Mrs. Van Vleck had taken to palanquins and litters immediately and ecstatically. She

just loved them. All women do. The American man loathed it. Most of them do.

If the chair allotted to him this morning had been plainer, he still would have loathed it, but he would have loathed it less. One must not let one's own country down in an ornate, impressionable Oriental capital, Legations felt, quite soundly, and Europeans of diplomatic standing and affiliation rode about Peking and its environs as finely chaired as Chinese etiquette would suffer them. Chinese sensitiveness debarred them from riding in chairs of Imperial yellow. The chair-coolies of a Minister's wife might not wear or ape the Imperial liveries, nor could she closely repeat in her man-borne equipage that of the Emperor's First Wife or even of an Imperial Concubine, but she could show considerable splendor in chair hangings, curtains and cushions and in her Chinese servants' livery. Mr. John Thorn of South Dearborn Street rode in finery to the picnic—and he loathed it. No man likes to look ridiculous; the American man likes it least. John Thorn felt disgustingly ridiculous, and believed that was just how he looked. He cursed the quick-padding, almost naked coolies that swung along sweatingly with the creaking carrying-poles of his chair on their calloused, muscular shoulders; he cursed the blue and green cushions he sat on—when he didn't sprawl in unhappy response to a sudden lurch—his legs and feet dangling unpicturesquely and uncomfortably down before him; he cursed the jolting and swaying—he cursed it all. But his only other means of progress would have been on a sturdy but diminutive donkey, a sweet-souled donkey perhaps, but it had wicked-looking ears, a rebellious expression of countenance, and legs thinner and shorter than Thorn's own. Even for Aunt Hilda he would not

voyage across China on a donkey. And hence the chair.

It was only just dawn when they went single file through the narrow gateway of the P'ing Tse Mên—another disgruntlement for Thorn of Chicago, an up-and-doing man, but not fond of rising sooner than the sun.

Parts of the route they took were ugly: slimy, smelly lanes that reeked sordid poverty and grim suffering, where angry dogs and belligerent long-legged hens disputed their progress, and frowning yellow-clads made way for them discourteously; barren stone-strewn stretches. But parts were lovely: blossoming orchards, meadows of wild flowers, tiny tender villages with prayer-rags fluttering on the god-pole, kindly cattle munching contentedly in fields of clover, wheat farms greening in the sunrise, water-wheels dripping slowly on the creamy blossoming buckwheat, women washing at the brook-sides, urchins gathering fire-wood, laughing little girls herding goats, women bustling about their doorways, temples among the tamarisks, pagodas with their bells softly tinkling—all alike, no two alike—tapering up from the grain-fields and hill slopes towards the rose-tinted clouds that flecked softly the pale blue, green-streaked sky of early morning. They had left the pink walls and the golden roofs of the Forbidden City behind them. Through vistas that the white-trunked silver ash trees gave the marble-terraced, yellow-roofed, gardened and belaked Summer Palace beckoned them. Beyond it the Western Hills all amethyst and silver in the yellowing sunlight watched and called them. Thorn disliked it all. His long legs were cramped; he was getting hungry; and he had promised his aunt that he'd make himself agreeable to all the Chinese, of his own sex and of hers, that

the picnic thrust upon him. How the devil did a man of Illinois make himself agreeable to Chinese maids and matrons?

For full three hours they pounded and jolted on. The sun flamed orange in a cloudless sky of blue flame. Day pulsed and scorched. If John Thorn's nose was not cooked, it felt so. Prickly-heat had made his wrists its own. He was perspiring in several places. Worst of all his right foot had gone to sleep.

At last they halted!

A moss-grown path, beside a gurgling brook, twisted through a little valley columned here and there with stately, gracious trees and almost enwalled with gourds that hung ripening jewels on scores of sturdy, graceful trellises, and hung from vines that climbed willows and fir trees. The young grass was a glowing tapestry of wild flowers.

"A dandy place," Thorn would have pronounced it—in America. Here in China, he did not *see* it.

He extricated himself with as little display of awkwardness as he could. And getting out at all, standing up, were petty torture, for by now his left foot had followed his right foot's pricking example.

Instantly Lady Elsie Grantham pounced upon him gaily.

"Here you are, Mr. Thorn! Hasn't it been delightful! Isn't this heavenly! Let me present you to my friend, Miss Feng. She's the dearest thing! You are to give her a good time, and see that you take special care of her. Dear Miss Feng, Mr. Thorn. Billy is looking for me, I must run." And she did.

Thorn bowed; his "asleep" feet nearly threw him.

Feng Me-lah dropped her eyes to hide their mirth as she bowed with quiet cordiality—and waited.

John Thorn waited, too—embarrassed and tongue-tied. He wished that Elizabeth Kent would join them or even Lee Wong. Neither did or was in sight.

"I am glad to meet you," Feng Me-lah said pleasantly when she saw that he was not going to say anything at all. "You are a great friend of my father's friend, Mr. Lee Wong. It is a pleasure to make the acquaintance of a friend's friend."

"Thank you," Thorn stammered.

Since he had his orders to be especially charming to this young yellow lady, it was a social convenience that she spoke English, and spoke it so readily. But almost he wished she could not.

"Mr. Lee Wong admires you much, Mr. Thorn. Thorn John are you not?"

Miss Feng waited generously for the American gentleman to contribute a few words to their better acquaintance, and then good-naturedly filled the gap that threatened to grow awkward.

"How shall I amuse you, Mr. Thorn? The Lady Ell-see bid me I was to amuse you."

"I ought to amuse you," John protested lamely. He was horribly uncomfortable, but it was not the poor girl's fault that she'd been born a Chinese.

Miss Feng might have replied quite truthfully that he had amused her already. She said instead, "But, no; you are in my country, our guest here, it is for me to amuse you, if I can."

Thorn racked his brain in vain. He lifted his eyes, a little surreptitiously, towards the Chinese hills, in search of an idea, but no help came from those storied sacred hills of many temples, musicked by a thousand temple-bells, dark with cypress, white with silver-ash and white pine trunks, yellow-roofed by the travel-

palaces of the Imperial Manchus. He dropped his eyes despondently to the ground, and saw Feng Melah's feet.

The girl's quick eyes followed his and sparkled naughtily. "My Manchu shoes amuse you, is it not?"

"Nice, sensible shoes for a sloppy place like this. Much nicer altogether than most of the ladies' shoes in these parts—hope you do not mind my saying so."

"Why is it I should? Girls like their clothes admired always, is it not, even Chinese girls in China, Mr. Thorn John. You like not the Chinese binded lilies. We do not have them ever, we who are Manchus. For I am not Chinese. I am what you call Chinese, but not what is Chinese in really. I am a Manchu. We wear our feet as they are born with us. This is a Manchu shoe I wear, always we wear them out of the house door. They are not because the grass is wet. You speak wrong of this we stand on. It is dry-dry. See, my shoes is not the little wetted!" She held out one foot daintily, sole up, that he might see how unsoiled it was. Thorn wondered how she balanced herself so easily on one foot, shod with a three-inch heel on the middle of her shoes' sole. And he saw how small her feet were, and how trimly stockinged.

"I beg the grass's pardon, Miss Feng," John conceded with a laugh that apologized to her herself; and looking up as he spoke he noticed what bright eyes she had, rather pretty eyes, not squeezed or squinting, put in her head as straight as his, and heavily lashed. She was almost white. The Manchus often are. Some of them are very white.

"Shall we sit down?" Thorn suggested.

The Manchu girl laughed at him naughtily. "Here? Fie-fee! On the pathway here we get

walked on. Come then, I show you where we make our sit-down rest."

Feng Me-lah's laugh was a pretty thing to hear, for all it frankly mocked him, and for all he liked being laughed at as little as most of his sex do. It was a musical ripple, not in the least like the constant giggle of Chinese girls. The girlish giggle of China frayed Thorn's nerves every time he heard it.

Feng Me-lah led the way across the ferns and anemones, and he followed her, remembered his promise to his aunt and caught up and walked beside her.

"Here?" she dropped down against a camphor tree. Thorn lowered his long length beside her; he had to.

"What shall we talk about?" Me-lah asked gravely. What the devil should they?

She waited for him to answer.

"Foreign missions?" John suggested desperately.

Feng Me-lah made a face—a dainty denial that was not a grimace. "No time! We will talk about something nice, on a day so beautiful as this, and in a place too so beautiful. And we will make our talk about something interesting. What to be it?"

"Tell me about—about—about the Manchus," Thorn plumped at last. "I'm afraid I am no end ignorant about you all over here."

"There are others," Miss Feng said softly with a friendly smile. The girl had a pretty voice—when you got used to it. Hanged if she hadn't!

"I thought you were Chinese, one of China's castes, the ruling class."

"There are no castes in China."

"Glad to hear it. We have none either. Silly things; insolence and injustice."

"We are not Chinese. We came to China a great

many years ago, and we conquered China, when the Bright Dynasty decayed and fell. We conquered and stayed here. Then little by little the Chinese conquered us. They always do. I think they always will." She broke off to wave her hand lightly to Lee Wong as he strolled by them. Miss Kent was walking with Mr. Lee.

John Thorn did not wave his hand. He just lifted his hat stiffly. The English girl acknowledged him as slightly.

"Many doubt it, I know. Believe that China is on her downgrade at last—to be broken up and conquered, not again to absorb or conquer. I cannot think it. But I am only a girl and ignorant. We conquered China by force, fighting, arms. China did not conquer us by force. She conquered us by charm and character, absorbed us, dominated us because her ways were better than our ways, her culture greater, her intellect more. We are not the ruling class, not except in name now. China cannot be ruled except by her own ideals and the spirit of her past. That is why I believe that no people, no alien, antagonistic peoples ever will conquer China, not thoroughly or for long. China rules herself—morally, at least. Such rule cannot be broken by immorality or by meaner morality."

China moral! Thorn dropped his eyes. Let the girl think so, if she really did. He wasn't going to argue with a girl. It was no use ever. He certainly was not going to argue with a Chink girl!

"We have been here more than two hundred and sixty years now. We have grown to them, have grown to their ways and to their thought in much. We are good friends, the Chinese and we. But in some outward things and in others—a few—of more importance we keep to our own ways and leave them to

theirs. We have freedom, we who are Manchu women. Our dress is different. I rule my father's house since my mother left us. I speak with him as an equal. I am not shut in, as Chinese girls of birth are. A Chinese girl could not sit here and laugh with you—not a nice girl. You shall come to laugh with me in my own home, and my father will welcome you. Lee Wong's father will not welcome you to his harem."

Lee Wong's father would not! Thorn resolved.

"You speak as if you liked the Chinese, Miss Feng—the Chinese who, so you say, have proved more conquerors of you than you of them!"

"Of a sureness do I. All ones like the Chinese who know them."

Thorn picked up a twig and began to poke a hole in the moss.

"I don't believe the Chinese are more intelligent than the Manchus," he asserted politely.

"Much more," the Manchu girl reasserted placidly. "The best minds of all that she admits to her council halls are Chinese minds."

"She?" Who was the girl talking about now?

"The Old Buddha," the girl said proudly. And Thorn thought with a good deal of affection too. "She who rules us all. The Imperial Mother-one."

"Oh, I see, you mean the Empress."

"No," Miss Feng corrected, "the Empress Dowager. Neither of the empresses has any concern with our statecraft. Several of the concubines have more."

John Thorn flushed. He knew what sort of things went on in the Forbidden City, worst of all inside the Sacred Palace. "Sacred" indeed! He "knew" many such things that did not happen at all. We learned a great deal in Peking in those days of the intimate happening inside the Palace Precincts

—especially those of us who never got farther from Legation Quarter than the Manchu City's outer wall.

Thorn knew; and he did not intend to listen to any girl, white, buff, brown or black, talk about such things.

"But," he changed the subject, steered it towards a less questionable angle, "the old Empress is a Manchu, isn't she? She's got plenty of brains, hasn't she? All the Legations seem to think so."

"Of course, Her Majesty is a Manchu. My father says that hers is the finest, strongest mind in China. All who know her best think that. Manchus are not always fools, Mr. Thorn. What I meant was—and it is true—that the Chinese average of intellect is much higher than ours—we Manchus."

"Ever seen her?" the American asked idly. He was not interested in T'zū Hsi. Nothing in China, except the way out of it, interested John Thorn—yet. He said it because nothing else occurred to him to say.

"Often. She sends for me sometimes. She loved my mother, and for that, and too—but not so much—for the constant service my father does her, our Old Buddha gives me gracious kindness. I have freedom of the Palace almost with the Royal Princesses themselves. Her Majesty has a very loving heart."

If she had, it was not so rumored in the Legations. Thorn did not believe a word of it.

"What's the Palace like?" he again questioned idly. "What sort of building is it?"

"It is not a building," Feng Me-lah laughed. "It is many buildings, a city of palaces and pavilions. Its lakes and cascades, who can count them? Perhaps our Empress Dowager can; no one other, I am sure. The god-ones on high must envy its gardens, oftentimes I think. The Palace in Peking, the Summer

Palace, not more than two *li* distant from here, beyond the Jade Fountain that sings us its song through those white-ash trees, Feng Me-lah has no word-tell to describe; they are wine in the blood when your eyes feast on them. I have seen the boast-spots of Europe, born-before-I-was Thorn John. Of a great trueness not Vienna, not Venice, not Moscow, not Spainland has beauty to make faint-even compare to our Imperial Palace-homes. The Son-of-Heaven is heavenly housed in paradise gardens. And she who rules them is wonderful as they, fitting to them, they fitting to her. Our Mother is true-words a god-one. Still stronger than steel is the will of our Imperial-lily-one, tender as the heart of Kwan, our Hearer-of-cries, is her kindness. Relentless as Winter-time storm that beats above Omi, dangerous as the angered currents that swirl in the gorges of the Yellow Sorrow is her wrath. She rarely forgives, she never forsakes. She never forgets. The flowers laugh up at her as she passes among them. She knows and cherishes them all. The birds come to her when she calls them. She knows and cherishes them all. None of us who best know and most worship her can read her. She reads us all at a glance. Suns shine in her eyes; but, too, are they rapiers. Great is her bounty, greater her wisdom; she is impatient, she has enormous patience; great are her rewards, great and swift are her punishments. For her rest and refreshment she studies the words of the Sages and coaxes her lute. For her sport often she gambles with her ladies. When she loses, that instant with a laugh and a shrug she pays; when she wins she let not that we make her the pay. She like not the encroach Europe make on China. She lives for China. She rules herself."

Thorn saw the girl's eyes flood with tears. That

was more than he'd bargained for. He looked about nervously for excuse and means of escape. An American girl in tears did him every time—thank the Lord American girls didn't go in for tears much. He never had known one to cry at a picnic, not unless she'd sprained her ankle or seen a spider or a snake. And an American girl wouldn't cry before a brand-new acquaintance, not for anything, if she could help it. And a Chink girl! What was he to do now? Ought he to offer up his only handkerchief on the altar of interracial cordiality?

But Feng Me-lah's tears did not fall. They knew better than that. They just stayed where they were and made Feng Me-lah's black eyes sparkling through them lovelier than ever. The girl did have nice eyes!

And escape came to him. The Duchess brought it.

"Come on, you two," she demanded briskly as she bore down upon them, "you look quite too comfortable. Come and help me with the luncheon baskets. You can help Elizabeth find the paper-napkins, Miss Feng. I know there are some somewhere, though the servants swear there are not. You can cut the champagne wires, Mr. Thorn, and see that the corks don't pop out too soon."

"I'm your man for that!" Thorn sprang up with alacrity. Then he remembered Feng Me-lah. He supposed he'd have to haul her up; the Duchess didn't look like doing it. She had one arm full to overflowing and the other fuller, a salad bowl in one arm, a tray of cumquats and figs in the other. He turned toward Miss Feng and half held out his hand.

But Feng Me-lah had risen as soon as he had. How the dickens had she managed it with those stilt-like shoes of hers? He'd watch and see the next time. If you had to come to China, you might as well learn

all the ropes you could, to tell about in Chicago when you got back to that better, saner land.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN she worked she worked indeed. When she played she seemed to give herself up to it completely, and as a rule she did—as far as she could. For she knew that only so, by making every playtime a time of rest, could even her will of steel, her undivided devotion and her intense and burning patriotism, stand the multitudinous, complex, increasing strain of her thousand jangled affairs of State. But the Sovereign who shirks no atom of his anointed burden never can, even for a moment, quite forget the contesting cross-currents of a nation's sea of troubles, or the sole hand at the helm relax; and least of all when that state-burdened sovereign is but a woman. If love is a sacrament, always it is a sacrifice, often a self-crucifixion, be it love of woman, love of man, love of children, love of country. Paramountly must a King's love and guarding of his people be self-sacrificial. T'zū Hsi in her happiest half-hours of relaxation never forgot her perplexities and cares. When she lounged laughingly in her painted pleasure boat afloat on the silver lakes of her parks and gardens of the Summer Palace, when she listened to her slave girls at their lutes, when she watched her tiny sleeve-dogs romping across the flower beds, always she saw a dark cloud in the West, felt the ominous whirr of the wings of a bird of prey moving on China from the West. Always she was troubled by some danger that threatened China, some danger of alien encroachment,

danger of misery because of a crop that had failed where the peasant huts were poor, danger of wrangling jealous factions, danger from the angered gods, danger from disloyal servants. Always T'zū Hsi's playtime was troubled.

And she was so alone; alone in her womanhood as no man need ever be. There were councilors and servants whose loyalty she trusted, others whose ability she trusted. There was none, whom she could trust for both fealty and ability.

Sometimes when she sat at the silk she loved to paint (not because she knew her skill was great, but because she loved the art and the beauty which she tried to mirror) her hand flinched at some pounding memory of her girlhood, and she laid her brush down and fell to musing sadly of the Manchu home of her childhood, the garden she had romped in with her lovely girl-like mother, the long hours of study that her father the White Bannerman had enjoined before he died, he perhaps the most accomplished noble in China, preeminent for scholarship among the not often scholarly Manchus. She thought with moistening eyes of those long-ago days, of toys put away, playmates forsaken and Mother and home lost—for a throne and a palace. She mused sometimes, with a twisted smile on her whimsical, brooding face, of the soft, easy maiden garments she had exchanged for the thorn-lined robes of State. She mused of the Emperor for whom she had been chosen, and who had chosen her his favorite among many, and whose choice she had accepted—for no Manchu, man or maid, can be wed or given into marriage or half-marriage unconsenting. And she dreamed of her babe, the Emperor-one who had died.

When she was gayest, seemed most care-free, the soul of T'zū Hsi brooded over China, chafed at China's

sorrows, schemed China's better welfare, wrestled for China's safety.

When she seemed most careless, she was watching, listening.

She knew that many frank or unguarded confidences denied her in the council chamber she might filch, or might leak to her in play hours' lessened ceremony. And she knew how much the master mind often can find to hoard and ponder from the thoughtless prattle of inexperience.

To-day she had only Feng Me-lah with her in the ivory skiff. Always low-voiced, to-day she guarded her tones carefully, that the boatmen who stood poling them—for her servants could not sit in her presence, no matter how long or hard the service they did—might not catch what she said.

"Tell me, Feng Me-lah, is the sick lily better?"

"Gracious mistress, the beautiful blue lily is almost well."

"And has the little love-hen in the red azalea hatched her eggs?"

"All her three eggs! My red azalea is a lovely nursery now. The little love-hen is so much proud and happy. I am so proud and happy, Imperial mistress. I think the love-bird husband-and-father-one is prouder and happier than his wife and I are. Oh, it is tender to see him flutter about them. The importance of him, Madam, when he brings a worm! The ownership of him, the condescension of him when he chirps to them! Yes, most Celestial Lady, I think that he is a little happier and greatly prouder than we are—the little mother-hen and I."

"I doubt it not," the Empress laughed. "When you were born, Feng Yu swelled with pride until I feared he'd burst. And I think he was even happier

than your mother was. You are very like her, girl. I see some new likeness to her in you every moon. I would that the Dragon had not carried her so soon on-high. For your sake I wish it, Feng Me-lah, and I wish it for my own. I miss my friend. You need your mother. I need my mother still—only Kwan Yin-ko knows how I need her when the storm winds shriek about me. Tut! This is our happy hour, little playmate-one, whom I love for your mother's face that you wear, and for the mirth that musics in your laughing. I will not mar our hour of play-time by thoughts or words that are sad. The gods know best. We but mock them when we grieve after due grieving time has gone. Tell me gossip, girl. Give me to laugh till I crack my paint—should crack my paint had I not put my face-paints away years ago to wear honorably my cross of widowhood. Tell me gossip, child."

"What will it please Your Majesty that my gossip recounts?"

"What you will, girl," Old Buddha answered lazily. "Have the actors been in your father's garden since you were here?"

"Lady, no."

"Has Lee No-chee come to visit you? What robe wore she?"

"Lee No-chee has not made to me a visit, or me to her, since I last knelt before you, Celestial Mistress."

"Half a moon since you saw Lee No-chee your closest friend! What a coldness!" the Empress laughed.

"But I have seen her, Imperial Madam—and there is no coldness ever between Lee No-chee and Feng Me-lah. I saw and had pleasant time with Lee No-chee but two days gone."

"You met at Kwan's temple?"

"Royal Lady, it was not there. We both were at the picnic in the Valley of Gourds, that the Legations ladies made."

"So they did," T'zũ Hsi said indifferently. "Was there music or only English food?" The Dowager yawned. It was clear the Legations ladies' picnic bored her.

But Imperial questions must be answered. Thinking anxiously what she could tell next that would bore the Old Buddha least, Feng Me-lah said, "There was but little music, great Mistress. There was much eat. Lady Sahra sang a fun-song, and the English lord her brother whistled the accompany and cracked his fingers in beat-time."

"Coarse songs and coarse foods. Enormous pieces of animals and fish and harsh wine-drinks, cold like the shiver, in rough not-beautiful-of-shape bottles made to boast the high-cost by neck-jackets of cheap gilt paper. It was dull-time for you, little flower of China."

"I did not find it dull," Feng Me-lah owned.

"You are a brave girl," the Empress said. "While you live, be brave Feng Me-lah; we may have much need, you and I. Tut—I grow grave again. I thrash me for that," T'zũ Hsi beat her jeweled sleeve lightly with her tiny fan. "Name me the guests, girl. Name the foreigners of the picnic. Tell me of them that I may laugh."

T'zũ Hsi showed no interest as Feng Me-lah obeyed. Her eyes wandered from shore to shore; it was clear she cared more for the arrow-flowers among the lake's fringe of maidenhair and columbines than she did for aught Feng Yu's daughter could tell her of the Legations' picnic. She yawned at the Duchess of Charn-

ley's name. Yet she kept Me-lah to the one subject.

"Did they question you of me—the foreign ladies? It has reached me that they are curious. Did they question you of our court-life? Pry you of our Forbidden City, and of this our summer-time Palace?"

Feng Me-lah could not deny that.

But she stammered a little as answering she repeated what had been asked her.

If T'zū Hsi had been bored, she was amused at last. If, as Feng Me-lah had feared, she was incensed she did not show it. She chuckled more than once, twice she nodded sagely. Once she bit her lip—in amusement, Feng Me-lah hoped.

"And what request did they press upon you?"

"Greatest-one," the girl stammered, flushing rose-red.

"You think I am a witch? *Aie*, they always seek a favor-thing. Most time they demand it. Demand it of us here in China! Always they want something to get—a tea-box or a fan, a silk or a secret. What asked they of you, like-the-mignonette-one? What requested of you the English Duchess-one, and her friend the American lady with the name of Holland!"

"A thing so impossible, so beyond presumption that Feng Me-lah dares not speak it." The girl's voice shook.

"Pish! I told you we must be brave, you and I, lotus-like-one. Afraid to speak it! I will speak it then. Asked you to tell them how many children I had killed and eaten?"

"Heaven-one, no! Or with my hand would I have slain them."

"A small jewel for such throat-cutting, little, tender lily-one. Asked they you to smuggle them into my pavilion, hide them behind a curtain while they took

my photograph? They all photograph. They do it very poorly."

"Royal Madam, no—not that," the girl sobbed.

"Tell me then! Speak it plainly."

"May Kwan protect me, they asked me— Your Majesty will slay me, you will banish me forever from your august presence.

"You lie glibly, child-one of my heart. I will neither kill nor banish you. You need not Kwan Yin-ko's protection from me. But I may shake you, if not soon you speak it plainly. Speak it now." The Empress still spoke gently, but her tone was not to be disobeyed.

"Celestial-one who rules us," the girl whispered hoarsely, "they bade me, coaxed me is more true, to induce your Imperial Majesty to invite them that they visit you here in your Summer Palace."

T'zū Hsi's eyes crinkled, her fine mouth twitched. She did not move, but the little ivory boat seemed to rock with her mirth.

And Feng Me-lah thanked all the god-ones, silently vowed Kwan many perfumed tapers, that the Imperial great-one had taken it that way.

"Only that? Well, it might be amusement," the Old Buddha chuckled. "A new amusement," she added softly, her far-off eyes on the high camel-hump bridge that just showed beyond a jasmine-hung tea-house and arched a canal of jade-green water with gray stone lace and embroidery. The girl did not hear the grimness of the other's embittered heart in T'zū Hsi's voice. Feng Me-lah could not see the nails cut into T'zū Hsi's arm underneath the Old Buddha's sleeve.

"Shall we give them a picnic here in our gardens? serve them tea in our throne room, or on the terrace of the Temple of Heaven? What say you, girl?"

Feng Me-lah made no reply. She lifted a quivering face to T'zũ Hsi, and the old omnipotent saw how near the tears were to the child's startled eyes.

The Dowager stroked the girl's trembling hand caressingly with the tiny painted fan, and Old Buddha's eyes were full of tenderness.

The Dowager called a word across the silver-rippled water. The attendant larger boats drew nearer, breaking into music; the music of the slave-boys' lutes, painted silken drums and golden bells, and the music of happy human voices—the court ladies singing to their Mistress.

T'zũ Hsi hummed under her breath, humming the gay tune softly with smiling lips. As she hummed she took the basket of blossoms that lay beside her up on to her knee and began to pelt with roses and head-heavy hyacinths her women as they sang to her. A rose fell short, floated on the lake; T'zũ Hsi laughed. A rose caught a Princess on a tiny flower-like ear; T'zũ Hsi clapped her jeweled hands; all the others laughed joyously—even the slave-boys and the rowers standing to their oars. A rose hit a concubine on her pretty painted mouth. T'zũ Hsi cried out self-applause. They all laughed delightedly; the concubine laughed merriest of all, as well she might who had been touched by the flower Old Buddha's hand had touched.

She kept the best flower till the last, and it she laid on Feng Me-lah's silken knee and bade the girl tuck it in her robe.

All the rest they said was gay; soft, glad words of the golden day, the flower-gemmed garden, the shimmering beauty of the lake, the emerald and beryl glory of the leaf-laced trees—Chinese talk of Chinese things, love-words of home and country.

The Manchu girl's heart sang. Only Kwan Yin-ko knew how the Manchu woman's heart ached.

As they floated lazily homeward to the fern-quivered shore the Empress Dowager spoke no more that was grave.

As they sauntered across the asphodels and violets towards Her Majesty's pavilion the Empress went smilingly, Feng Me-lah at her mistress' side, all the lovely bevy of rich-clad, jeweled women, all the slave-boys behind them, a score of palace eunuchs last, followed in happy, obsequious attendance.

Once more, midway to her lodging, T'zũ Hsi harked back gaily to the Legations picnic at the Meadow-of-Gourds.

Bending down to pluck a spray of maidenhair, as she bent up again holding it out from her to watch the sunshine's jeweled play upon its delicate fronds, the Old Buddha asked, but she asked it lightly, "They were kind to you, Feng Me-lah, the foreign ladies at their foreign picnic?"

"Much kind, Celestial Mistress. They made great notice and care of all of us. We had little chance to speak with each other, we who are native here in China, so close did some of them—the Legation ladies—devote themselves to each of us."

T'zũ Hsi twirled her spray of maidenhair fern slowly in her jeweled fingers. "If I fear them, they the far-come devil-ones who press now almost to my Palace walls, too they fear me," she thought. The Old Buddha liked the thought.

"How many of them, your new White friends, propose to favor me with their presence here?" she asked gaily.

"Three of them, Imperial Madam. The English Duchess lady——"

"She is of high estate in her own dark country," T'zũ Hsi said slowly, and as if she spoke it to herself. "Her lord the Duke-one has, it is told me," she added musingly, "the left ear of the English Queen. The other two?" she added briskly. Before the girl could answer, the Empress held up a hand for silence. Shafts and spears of sunlight cutting through silver ash trees washed with gold and rose a spray of white azalea blossoms at their path-side. Old Buddha held her breath, paused to look with kindled eyes and oddly softened face.

Presently she moved on again, more slowly, and repeated her question, not with words, but with a glance.

"The American lady who is great friend and intimate of English Duchess,"—T'zũ Hsi shrugged daintily—"and the English niece-one of English Duchess," Feng Me-lah answered instantly. They who served T'zũ Hsi were well used to their mistress' self-interruptions, well trained to wait her pleasure to hear their answers. Often the Dowager would break off something grave, even break away from moments of urgency and peril to listen or to look at something beautiful. A Western might have deemed it a feminine inconsistency. It was a Chinese sanity that kept the great and troubled Manchu Empress refreshed and ready, able and poised. The beauty of flowers and skies braced her—washed her mind. Many of T'zũ Hsi's hardest edicts were written after music's stimulation.

"Has the niece a lord? They have told me not of her."

"She is not wed, Great One, a girl thing. I found her lovely, though she gave me not her friendship."

"You need no friendship of theirs! Resembles she

her aunt Duchess, the English unwed who is not humble in friendliness?"

"Royal Madam, no. She looks more like me, I think!"

They both laughed.

"I saw, too," Feng Me-lah began thoughtlessly, "in her a look, I thought—" the girl broke off in piteous confusion, and red more burning than the fire-flowers' drenched her frightened face.

"A look of me!" the Old Buddha cried with a laugh. "Well you might, if indeed the White-one has a look of you, Feng Me-lah. Often, mignonette-one, your face reminds me of my girl-face years ago when I was at my mother's girdle, untouched by care, crown-free. If an Emperor woos you, girl, flee him. No man's love, not a Son of Heaven's, can repay a woman for the bitter burden of a State. A look of me! *Aie*, I must look upon her once—it may be," Old Buddha laughed. "So, but the three? No foreign man-ones proposed to you that they would visit me in my privacy?"

"Madam, no!"

"You spoke with their man-ones?"

"With of them several, Royal Mistress. They are shy and lack the satin polish of Chinese manners. But I thought them kind, I did not think all of them bad, I did not dislike them all."

"Shy? That is the last I should have expected to hear of them."

"So I found it, Madam. One of them was afraid to make words with me—at first. So afraid that I felt my pity for him."

"Pity no man, Feng Me-lah. Who was he, the man you pitied?"

"A man of the America, Imperial Mistress."

"It is not their reputation. Was he of their Legation?"

"No, Madam. He makes the travel."

"What seeks he here?"

"I think the nothing. And finds little content in being here, Great One, if I read him."

"Let him go to his home then. We will not delay him."

"His aunt-one delays him, Imperial lady. She rules him like to a Chinese mother. She makes her stay here to be with her friend-one the Duchess-one of England."

"There is a lord then of their party?"

"Yes, Supreme One, the lord-one of America."

"And you had much talk with him?"

"Almost much, gracious Mistress. But it was Feng Me-lah who made most of the talk-words."

"Did not he question you? Did he question you of me?"

"The American lord's questions were few things, Great Majesty. He asked of me not concerning Your Majesty. All he questioned was of the palaces and their gardens. In his own country, so the Mary Lady tell me when we put flowers adjacent to the eat things, he make much purchase and sell again of the house-things and land-things. That I think to be the why he find an interest and speak its curiousness of the Imperial buildings and the parks and gardens that sash them with wide girdles of beauty."

"Perchance he has the desire to buy of us a few of our pavilions, some *li* of our sacred park-lands, a lake or two, a pond of lotus," Old Buddha sneered lightly, "even as all the foreign peoples scheme their desire to buy and *own* the Legation houses we permit them live in. Remind me to bid him to *our* picnic—when

we give it. Did you like this White man-one, daughter-one of Feng Yu?"

"Greatest, Oldest Queen-one, I did not dislike him."

"So!" T'zŭ Hsi laughed. "Tell Pi-u-Shin to show you the new rainbow-fish in the silver lily tank before you leave the palace, child. They are pretty as flowers tossing in the sunlight; and as cunning to watch them as to watch the sleeve-dog puppies pranking in the wild asparagus."

At the yellow-tiled pavilion of camphor wood and jasper, T'zŭ Hsi the Emprëss dismissed them all.

But she called Feng Me-lah back to her, and spoke to her again, out of earshot of all the others.

"Say to Feng Yu your honorable father I would have him attend me to-morrow at the Hour-of-the-Tiger's close. Bid him that he bring to me with him Lee Wong the Chinese."

Feng Me-lah made obeisance.

T'zŭ Hsi standing alone on the pavilion steps smiled down at Feng Me-lah before she turned and went alone into her pavilion.

Only she herself, and Kwan the Hearer-of-cries knew how the Old Buddha's heart was aching or what it feared.

CHAPTER IX

JOHN complacently believed that his behavior had been most exemplary at the Legations picnic. When Aunt Hilda took him to task, almost sharply, he was greatly surprised, almost affronted.

"Well, I'm blessed," he protested hotly. "Didn't I beau three Chinese damsels pretty as pretty? Sure I did!"

"You were very nice to the Chinese ladies, Jack," Mrs. Van Vleck conceded, "I watched you——"

"Bet you did!"

"You were not at all nice to Elizabeth Kent——"

"Oh, her? How can a fellow be nice to a poker in petticoats! Show me a live-wire of a girl, and I'll play up to her. But an iceberg with A's as broad as Barnum's Fat Lady and O's as short as a pin's point——"

"All I ask is that you treat her with common politeness. You might do that much for me, Jack."

"Thought I did."

"Then, you have another thought coming."

"I filled her glass with fizz. I passed her the sandwiches. Thought I treated her in a truly handsome manner. Don't like her, but I treated her all right."

"She's a dear girl and you were rude to her, John, two or three times. I will not have it."

"I say, Auntie Hild," Thorn asked suspiciously, "you don't figure to have me propose to her, do you?"

"Don't pretend to be a fool, Jack. That is just about the last thing I'd like."

"Reckon she'd like it less!"

"I reckon she would," Mrs. Van Vleck agreed darkly. "But it just about breaks my heart to have you rude to Joan's girl, Jack. And it makes me ashamed!"

"Bless your heart! I won't again then—if I can remember. What you say goes! You can count on that."

Mrs. Van Vleck patted her nephew's hand. "And there is another reason, John—I'm telling you a secret, mind—Elizabeth is half broken-hearted. It won't last of course. It never does with a girl. She isn't mar-

ried, and only a husband can break a woman's heart to stay. But it hurts pretty hard while it does last. And that is the other reason why I want you to be nice to her."

"What's she broken-hearted about?" Thorn demanded briskly, not because he cared, but to cover his confusion at the only possible reference he ever had heard Mrs. Van Vleck make to her own damaged life. "Broken-hearted's about the last thing I'd have suspected of her. Didn't think she had a heart."

"I have not the least idea what it's about. Joan won't tell me. I mean she has not told me. And, of course, I can't ask or hint or pry. But I know I am right."

Her nephew looked uncomfortable. He felt uncomfortable. Mrs. Van Vleck had a habit of being right. He did not like Elizabeth Kent, but he invariably winced to think that any woman was unhappy.

"Man, I suppose," he muttered disgustedly.

"Perhaps, perhaps not. There *are* other things beside a man that women care about."

"Not girls," Thorn insisted.

"You've a lot to learn, John," his aunt told him crisply. "You are safe to allow me to know more about girls than you do!"

Thorn bit back a superior masculine smile discreetly, and he made no comment. But he felt sure that his aunt was wrong this time.

"Elizabeth did not want to come over here," Mrs. Van Vleck went on. "She had to be dragged. Joan let that much out. I don't believe that Joan herself particularly cared about coming either. I believe she came just on purpose to bring the girl, to get her a long way from home. Joan thinks no end of her husband. She hasn't said so, but I've picked it up—

couldn't help picking it up. She reads his letters twice, before she stuffs them back in the envelope. She writes to him every mail; it's more than she does to her boys. She doesn't care much for travel, had all she wanted of it years ago. She has said so twice. You can mark my words, Joan Kent came for nothing but to bring Elizabeth a long way off for a time."

"When are they going back?" John asked with more interest than the subject of Miss Elizabeth Kent often evoked from him.

"Haven't made up our minds yet," his aunt said cheerfully.

Thorn groaned inwardly. He hoped his aunt was not going to follow her Chinese sojourn with one in England. And one thing was sure; no matter what Aunt Hilda said, he would not be on in that act! But he wouldn't tease the girl any more, or squabble with her. Worry Aunt Hilda was the last thing he wanted to do. He would treat the girl as well as he possibly could from this on, no matter how it bored him. It would bore him a lot. He was sorry about her, if it was true; but he had a poor opinion of any girl who was eating her heart out over some darned Englishman—if she was, and if she had a heart to eat!

To do Thorn justice he had shown Miss Kent no less friendliness at the picnic than she had shown him. And the Duchess of Charnley had been as displeased with her niece as Mrs. Van Vleck had been with John.

At the very time that Mrs. Van Vleck was taking John Thorn to task, the Duchess remonstrated with Elizabeth.

Every whit as brave as her American friend, yet the Duchess went about remonstrance more guardedly.

Elizabeth was almost of age, and the aunt was anxious not to drive her to open rebellion which proba-

bly would take the form of immediate return to England. She was most anxious to keep Elizabeth out of England for a year, or even longer, if she could. That far, at least, Hilda Van Vleck was right. There was nothing particularly wrong with Hugh Lester in himself, the Duchess had to own that, but in her opinion, and in all the family's, as a prospective husband for Elizabeth, Lester was very wrong indeed. A year ago it had been clear that that was the rôle for which Hugh was attempting to qualify, and none of her startled relatives had much doubt that Elizabeth reciprocated his mad idea. If it came to any sort of understanding between the more than agreeable ineligible and the orphan girl, opposition would be useless. Geographical detachment before inclination hardened into resolve was their only chance, they all agreed. They were not in a position to deport the man; nothing remained but to remove Elizabeth, if they could, soon enough, far enough and long enough. Elizabeth's favorite aunt was unanimously voted the one to do it—if she could. To their surprise and hers and greatly to her inconvenience the Duchess had succeeded. Whether Elizabeth was forgetting Lester at all, her aunt had no idea, and dared not probe, fearful lest even a guarded word might ignite. But she had brought Elizabeth all the way to China; she might be able to keep her here for the year or more which might effect a cure or produce a more desirable suitor. The Duchess fervently hoped that her Duke would muddle along not too disastrously without her, Reggie keep out of hopeless debt and even worse and softer entanglements, Mary not too terribly spoil Marjory and Harold.

Having sacrificed and risked for her dead brother's child, the Duchess did not intend to spoil it all by

incurring Elizabeth's displeasure about anything great or small. She approached the subject of her niece's augmenting discourtesy to Mr. Thorn more timorously than she ever before had approached anything in all her confident and positive life.

Elizabeth took her aunt's light rebuke lightly. But on the whole she took it rather better than Thorn had taken his aunt's. The quiet girl loved her aunt tremendously, had no remotest idea of why she had been decoyed to far Peking, and laughed good-temperedly and promised reform. She detested Mr. John Thorn, and said so; but she did not dislike Mrs. Van Vleck. She was genuinely glad to see the pleasure it gave the Duchess to be so much with an old friend. It had shown the girl a new and tender side of her unemotional relative that touched her. It was not fair to spoil Aunt Joan's delight in a girlhood affection so perfectly re-awakened. She would not do it again.

Good intentions! We all know what poor bank security they are; stout paving stones, defaulting prophets.

At a Legation dance that night John and Elizabeth danced together twice, sat out together once, and disliked each other more than ever. Their steps were irreconcilable. Their chat was as forced as their amiability.

To make things worse, and on her part the intrinsic ill-feeling between them more, Elizabeth overheard part of a conversation between Thorn and one of the Ministers that angered her absurdly.

She was waiting for one of the French attachés to bring her an ice. Voices came from the recess behind her seat. She could not avoid hearing unless she moved away—not easy to do in the thronged room. What the Minister and Thorn were saying was in no

way private. They were discussing Shakespeare's Sonnets. Thorn's argument, to her boundless amazement, showed undeniable scholarship. Elizabeth was not greatly read. She liked Romeo and Juliet, she loved Henry V. She had not read the Sonnets. The Chicago man's betrayal that always when he had troubled to talk with her at all he had studiously talked down to her, enraged her. The impertinence of it! The tang of salient American slang that had annoyed her unreasonably—for much of it had a sly eloquence of its own, and none of it was slangier than the service slang her soldier brothers used—had no part in what he said to the old diplomat. She had thought it a part of Thorn's own raw commonness; she saw it now a part of his cheap estimate of her, a social rudeness. He had talked to her flippantly, because he held her so. Insufferable!

The peach ice-cream arrived. But through the pretty nothings her French acquaintance dressed elegantly for her hearing, she caught a phrase now and then from the two men speaking together so gravely with such evident pleasure in the alcove. Ossian? Who was he? The Færie Queene! Had Thorn read it? She had not.

It was presumptuous of this Chicago person to know more of her country's literature than she did—1914 had not come then to make business a patriotism in the careless estimate of such English girl-aristocrats. Mr. Thorn worked for his living, she knew; she thought of him as something almost "in trade." It was ridiculous of Aunt Joan to treat him on such complete parity. And now the Minister!

And Thorn had "talked down" to her, spoken to her in his atrocious national slang—to *her*; and now to the old diplomat he was flaunting a cheap scholarliness

—of sorts! The creature was a bit of a prig. He had presumed to play the mountebank to her! And the Minister was speaking on equal terms, with evident respect, to Thorn. Her anger rose. Elizabeth Kent was young—and very English.

CHAPTER X

WHEN the Court went to its warm-weather quarters in the Old Buddha's favorite home, the Summer Palace, those of the principal Manchu families that could left Peking for their own estates clustered about the Summer Palace walls. It was very much pleasanter there than in the capital. The air was fresher, the flowers were more, leafy stretches of parks were longer and wider. And it was the thing to do. It smacked of Court affinity, and it opened up avenues of Imperial recognition and employment.

Feng Me-lah spoke of her father's estate a *li* or two beyond the Summer Palace walls as home more often than she did of his scarcely less charming and luxurious house and gardens in Peking's Manchu City.

Almost without the English girl's realizing that it was happening, something like friendship was growing between Feng Me-lah and Elizabeth Kent.

The Duchess and Mrs. Van Vleck had been invited to spend a day with the Fengs. If they had suspected at whose august instigation they received the invitation, Mrs. Van Vleck would have been a little flattered and not a little excited, and the Duchess instantly would have been suspicious.

Elizabeth had been included in the invitation, and

had gone because it was easier than staying away, and might prove no less dull than being left behind in socially thinning Peking.

She found it anything but dull, and a few days later when Miss Feng asked if Miss Kent herself alone would make another visit to her and see what a Manchu girl's every-day life was, Elizabeth went not unready. She knew how willing Aunt Joan was to spare her and to have an unbroken day of Mrs. Van Vleck's companionship.

Elizabeth left the hotel in some state, and not inconspicuously. Miss Feng sent her own carriage for her guest, a brougham every possible part of which was made of clear glass. Seated in it Elizabeth could see and be seen. Her own Chinese *amah* sat crouched at her feet. Coachman and footmen were elaborately turned out in Manchu liveries, two of Feng's banner-men rode before her, two followed, and four slave-girls attended her, two grave and sedate, two giggling and chattering, in bright blue chairs, whose bearers had to trot briskly to keep within sight and hail of the glittering glass carriage. The English girl had gone to make her first curtesy at the Court of St. James's more simply coached and attended than she journeyed now across Peking, out of a north gate, beyond the old Tartar Wall into the countryside that began everywhere just outside the capital's girdling Walls, and along the road now smooth and wide, now narrow zigzag lanes that led to Feng's summer home. Farm-lets, tiny junk-shops, a dozen temples seemed to pass them as they went: they went so swiftly and they never slackened, or increased, their speed.

She had thought the pace they took dangerous in crowded Peking although all they met had made way for the liveries of Feng Yu and the picturesque uni-

forms of his Yellow Banners. Out in the open country, sparsely built or peopled, it seemed safe enough, but needless and foolishly fevered.

It was early as they neared the great painted gates that swung open at the sound of their approach. Elizabeth's wrist-watch told it scarcely nine.

The latticed wall that wound in an indented crinkled circumference of *li* was very beautiful. Here and there double and triple roofs pointed it with their tiled down-slopings shell and bell hung, their corners guarded by phœnixes, lions, mythic frogs of plaster and majolica. On the west a clear canal lapped it between the cool shade of great twisted trees. East of it acres of beans perfumed it, behind it rose the amethyst and emerald beauty of the Western Hills.

Feng Yu himself came through the gate to welcome her, and held his hand to guard her stepping from the carriage—a warmer courtesy than he would have shown an Asiatic visitor of his daughter. When Feng led Elizabeth through the great red gate, the inner bar that held the home-place fast as a fortress fell so swiftly into its iron grooves that the four slave-girls, grave and giggling, and Elizabeth's *amah* with them, had to scurry in on their high shoes for dear life, or be barred out with the bannermen and bearers.

Feng Me-lah was waiting for her English friend, trim and crisp in her long blue cotton robe that hid her pretty crimson trousers, her long black hair hanging a splendid braided rope down her graceful back. She was dressed much more simply than Elizabeth had ever seen her; not a jewel, not even a flower.

Feng Me-lah gave her guest the salutation of welcome, not the Chinese salutation of uplifted, joined hands, but the ceremonial Manchu greeting of respect, dipping so low that the delicate tinted hands almost

touched the earth. Then laughing she ran on her stilt-like shoes swiftly to the other girl and drew Elizabeth's arm into her own, and led her so through the park-wide garden and a chain of courtyards into Me-lah's own apartments far inside the princely house.

Except the servants who came to serve them at their meals, (and the servants did not count) no one came to interrupt them all day long. Miss Feng's maids had taken charge of Elizabeth's *amah*.

It was a girls' day, gay and friendly, altogether friendly, inconsequential but for one thing.

They gossiped harmlessly, feasted delicately, and talked of the things that girls do everywhere. They talked of John Thorn and Lee Wong more than once—with considerable discretion. Elizabeth was surprised to suspect how much Miss Feng liked Mr. Thorn, and how well she seemed to know him. Feng Me-lah gathered and felt much the same of Elizabeth's acquaintance with Lee Wong. Elizabeth was annoyed, Feng Me-lah was amused. Possibly of the two it was the Manchu girl that was the more surprised. Lee Wong was all well enough—in his place—but she never had thought of him as growing easy in the society of Western girls, although she knew, of course, that Lee the teacher saw a good deal of a few of the older ladies in Legation Quarter.

Feng Yu had left them as they came through the garden. Elizabeth did not see him again until she found him at the great red gate, waiting not to bid her good-by, but to ride beside her back to the *Hôtel de Pékin*. For the dusk, that turns so soon to dark in the East, was near and Feng Yu would not let her journey through it with less escort than himself.

Elizabeth Kent spent a long, unaccustomed day in

the Manchu home. Perhaps the oddest thing about it was that she found so little strangeness in it. They did not play tennis. None of the food she ate had she ever tasted before, though she hoped she often should again. Even the tea she scarcely knew for tea.

Feng Me-lah showed Elizabeth some of her many treasures, and all of her belongings that she thought might interest an English girl. Elizabeth tried Me-lah's painted, canopied bed, and found it and its tight-rolled pillows hard and uncomfortable. She learned to eat melon-seeds, cracking them with an appetizing, appreciative snap; she managed after several failures to pick an indifferent note or two from the other's jeweled table-lute. She smoked one of Miss Feng's tiny jeweled pipes and liked it, but not the small fag of its constant refilling; she handled Me-lah's lovely garments and loved them. She explored the wooden foundation of the Manchu girl's head-dress and cried out at its weight.

"Doesn't it give you headache?"

"Sometimes, perhaps," Feng Me-lah admitted. "It keeps it on though, and keeps it straight; the inner wood does. And at Court we must wear it. I do not go beyond our gates without my head-dress. These black satin wings are supposed to be my own hair, and by our rule of costume they should be. But it took long, long time to dress the hair so, and very skilful, patient fingers. So our Old Imperial Buddha decided that the wings of satin would do as well. She herself wears them now. The satin keeps smooth better than hair would unless always you had thought to be of care."

Elizabeth tried on Feng Me-lah's gold and silver nail-protectors, and shuddered at their weight.

"They would break my fingers; they must lame yours."

"We are used to them," Miss Feng answered with a careless shrug. Then, with a laugh, "Let me dress you up, Ee-lis-bet Kent. Let me that I make a Manchu princess of you. You shall wear my best robes and my rose-jades strung with pearls. And I in this my poor dress shall be your serving-maid who tires you."

Laughingly they made the transformation. Me-lah's things all were too large, and long for the English girl, but they suited her. The Manchu shoes she could not manage at all. She was afraid of them. "They would break my ankles." But she let Miss Feng put her into all the rest. And Elizabeth knew that she never had looked half so pretty before as she did with Feng Me-lah's Manchu head-dress with its silken flowers and its jewels spread above her face. "Kwan my mother," Feng Me-lah half sobbed, "she is one of us! And she resembles our Matchless Queen-one. It is true, Ee-lis-bet Kent, on the gold and rubies ornament of my stomach, worth most of all my jewels, there is a look of Her Majesty with you now. You never have seen her, Ee-lis-bet Kent. To us she is of all things beautiful the most jade-like; her presence is the perfume of China, Her Majesty is terrible, her pity is boundless, her voice is the lute-music of heaven, her heart is Kwan Yin-ko's own heart. And robed so, you have with you a resemblance to our Holy Mistress."

Feng Me-lah wished to call her father, that he might see it too; but the English girl blushing painfully would not have it. Feng Me-lah had not painted Elizabeth. Nor had T'zū Hsi worn face-paint since her lord had gone on-high.

Miss Feng laughingly refused to try on the other's pretty English clothes.

"I should not look English in them. And always we are ugly when we wear them. You would hate me in your robe, and I long you to like me, Ee-lis-bet Kent."

"I promise you that I will do that," Elizabeth told her, and added, "I wish you would call me Elizabeth—just Elizabeth—as my friends at home do, and let me call you Me-lah." It was an odd request for Elizabeth Kent to make, to have made even of an English girl she had not known longer than she had Miss Feng. But naturally she did not add that she thought Feng a hideous name.

"I must not do that," Feng Me-lah told her guest. "It would be rudeness, if it I did. We may not cut a name into parts, not even a slave-one's name. But my milk-name, use it to me, please. In your language it is Green Pearl, in our tongue it is Lu Chu. What is your milk-name—pet-name you call it?"

"I never had one, not even when I was a baby. I was named before I was born. We are all Elizabeths—the first girl in all our families."

When the English girl had taken off—a little lingeringly—the splendid garments and the winged head-dress that Miss Feng insisted had made her look a little like T'zŭ Hsi, and wore her own things again, they explored part of the great roomy house and several of its courtyards. Feng Me-lah explained, Elizabeth touched and questioned.

The English girl was interested, sincerely if mildly. She saw and liked the taste that had decreed to each room just one thing of paramount value, by no means invariably money-value: one screen, one vase, a single

cabinet, chest, ivory, silk or scroll, a spray of blossom leaning slightly in a crimson vase. She exclaimed at the beauty of the latticed Chinese windows, all in perfect keeping, no two of them alike.

But it was the garden that made a lump rise in Elizabeth's throat.

"I hope they will never take it from you, Feng Me-lah," the English girl said wistfully as they sat on the carved stone bench, shaded by a silver ash tree at the edge of a world of roses. At their feet was a carpet of delicate vines all hung with fairy-like palest green flower-bells, Lu Chu or Green Pearl flowers—Feng Me-lah's name-flower, very lovely, delicately fragrant.

"Take what thing from me?" Lu Chu asked.

"This. Your home. You must love it dearly."

"That I must do. But I shall leave it some day, of course. Not to forget it, but to love another home place far more dearly."

"How could you! One's own, own home, the house you were born in, played in as long as you can remember; no other place can be that to you! Or half so much!"

"I shall love my husband's home he takes me to much, much more as I love this," Feng Me-lah stated sagely.

"That!" Elizabeth spoke contemptuously. "I shall not—if I ever have *that* sort of a home. It will never be home to me. Nothing ever will be my real home but The Beeches."

"The Beeches?"

"Our place in Surrey. We have a garden there—I wish I could show it to you."

"Tell me instead," Feng Me-lah said softly.

Elizabeth Kent's voice faltered more than once as

she told of The Beeches. She told it lingeringly, almost as if the young voice grieved to leave the old house and garden in English Surrey. John Thorn scarcely would have recognized her voice had he been there behind the screening rose-trees, nor easily believed it hers.

The Manchu girl heard more than the other girl said. And Feng Me-lah understood. Presently a girl's arm stole about Elizabeth's slender shoulders. And Elizabeth leaned a little against the Manchu girl.

It was an odd caress for Feng Me-lah to give, an odd liberty for Elizabeth Kent to accept. Feng Me-lah would not have led a close girl friend of her own race arm-in-arm as she had led Miss Kent from the great gate in the early dappled morning when the white cups of the shining hibiscus blossoms had drenched their way with almost maddening fragrance. The Manchu girl had done it in concession to Western custom and in added welcome to a girl far from home, in exile, it might be homesick for a grayer, more accustomed place; homesick even here in lovely, laughing China!

The Manchu has almost the pure-born Chinese's dignity of person; instinctive horror of casual corporeal familiarities. A brother will give a life for a brother, friend for friend, but *without a handshake*.

Feng Me-lah scarcely knew that she had put her arm about Elizabeth. But Elizabeth knew and was grateful.

As a rule Elizabeth Kent had almost as much dignity of personal reserve as a Chinese girl has.

When her father and Elizabeth had gone, Feng Me-lah walked back from the great gate very slowly. All the white hibiscus cups were closing into crinkled

balls of rose, shutting away their perfume from the garden. But the roses and the lilies and heliotrope gave the old garden more and more intoxicating sweetness.

Elizabeth, her Chinese maid at her feet, saw the first stars prick the darkling sky as her coach of glass turned into Peking. And she knew that to-day at least she had not disliked China.

It had been an odd day!

She had unbosomed herself—told her secret story—to a Chinese girl! And she had not been angry at being told that she a little resembled the terrible Empress Dowager.

It surprised her to realize what a thoroughly good time she had had. Had Feng Me-lah enjoyed it too, she wondered, or had the other girl's seeming pleasure been only the hospitality of her high breeding? Whatever the Chinese were, this Manchu girl was nice and charming. Perhaps, Elizabeth concluded as she fell asleep, she'd have to revise her estimate of the Chinese, at least of the Manchu Chinese. After all, what had she known about them when she made up her mind to dislike and condemn them lock, stock and barrel? Nothing at all. Uncle William always had spoken well of them. He set great store by many of his Chinese mementos, prized them, she knew, not because of their value but because of his liking of China. Uncle William was a good judge of most things. And he had spent several years in China somewhere with Gordon.

Perhaps she had been wrong.

A good many of the Legation people spoke rather more than well of them—of the Chinese.

CHAPTER XI

YOU need all your wits about you, and need them to be A 1 wits, if you are to succeed greatly in the real estate business in Chicago. Most American industries call for those twin qualities, but none more than the buying and selling for profit of Chicago property, improved or unbuilt on, urban or suburban. John Thorn was a prince at his business. He could pay his tailor, and a few others, always conveniently now; and he intended to die as rich as Paul Van Vleck had. More than one astute older Chicago business man believed that Thorn would do it.

He had left his heart behind him on South Dearborn Street and in a certain secretly owned subdivision he had bought several years ago. It had not cost much when he bought it, but it had cost more than he could afford, and more than once its enormously increasing taxes had strained him almost to breaking point. But Thorn had held on to it, and he had not broken. And the ever-growing City of Chicago crept nearer and nearer to Thorn's subdivision.

He had not left his wits behind him. Such men rarely do—because they rarely can. It isn't in them to do that, and they cannot afford it. John had brought all his wits to China with him. And since such quick mental equipment refuses to so much as doze, and he had no desire to acquire Chinese real estate or to speculate in it, Thorn had to employ his wits on all sorts of things in Chihli that he would not have noticed at all in Illinois.

The Duchess of Charnley interested him from the first. He liked her sterling affection for his aunt. He saw that it was as unaffected as it was undemon-

strative. The Duchess was demonstrative about nothing, though he noticed that about most things she was assertive. What she thought, she said, and had no concern as to whether you agreed with her or not. Thorn did not dislike her assertiveness. What American does dislike assertiveness? Certainly no American has any right to! This Englishwoman's undemonstrativeness appealed to him. Perhaps he found it refreshing after a lifelong surfeit of demonstrativeness.

John fell into the habit of watching the Duchess of Charnley and of listening to her when she spoke, whether she was speaking to him or to someone else.

And that was how it came about that he learned for a certainty what the Duchess never told even his aunt; learned just why and because of what man Miss Kent's aunt had brought the girl to Peking.

He saw the Duchess' eyes flinch for the fragment of a second one night at a dinner table; and then Thorn knew it all, knew what Elizabeth never had suspected.

A man newly come from England said to Miss Kent, "A friend of yours saw me off—Hugh Lester. We were at Winchester together. Ripping fellow, Lester. Wanted him to come along—he said he'd give his head to; but he couldn't manage it."

Elizabeth was helping herself to fish, and Thorn did not see her face, until she'd had time to control it—if she needed to control it. But Thorn was not watching Miss Kent. And if he had suspected that she would feel any special interest in the mention of a Mr. Hugh Lester's name, he would not have looked at her for the world.

He was watching the Duchess, as he so often did. The Duchess was not helping herself to fish. John's eyes saw her eyes flinch. The woman whom he be-

lieved the soul of grit was frightened. Aunt Hilda had been right that time, Elizabeth Kent was in love—perhaps entangled—with a man of whom the Duchess disapproved, and his name was Hugh Lester. His opinion of Miss Kent had been wrong in one particular at least. He would have said that she was entirely heart-free, if ever a girl was—and if she had a heart in that chill little being of hers.

All he could say was, he was sorry for Mr. Lester if he got the girl! But perhaps Englishmen liked them like that. He was a bit sorry for Elizabeth, too; it was hard lines to be carried against her will so far from the man she cared for, if she cared. An American man always is a sentimentalist at core, except in business. Most of them have even more heart than head, again except in business. Even in business the most successful American business men have a good deal of heart. It is this heart, more than appetite, that clings to Mother's pie and cookies. And there are very few, if any, American men who are not soft-hearted towards all women. Thorn felt kindlier to Elizabeth Kent than he had ever done before. He would be nicer to her; he didn't think he'd find it hard, even if she tried him. He wondered if she longed to escape from China back to England, and he harbored a flickering thought of contriving to lend her her fare. There were a lot of fares in that string of pearls she was wearing, but probably they were heirlooms, or perhaps the Duchess loaned them to her. He had an idea that the girl had no money of her own.

Much as he liked the aunt, little as he liked the niece, it seemed to him preposterous that a woman of fifty should coerce a girl of twenty in regard to the girl's marriage. He had all a young American's sturdy

conviction of the rights of youth, of its sure self-sovereignty, even of its wisdom. Naturally Elizabeth knew far better than the Duchess could whom Elizabeth ought to marry.

He suddenly felt mildly friendly toward the English girl, and inclined to be more friendly with her, if she met him half-way. He looked across the table at her speculatively. She looked almost pretty to-night. There was something cute about that still little face of hers.

"I shall never rest," a woman's voice cut clearly the length of the table, "until I have met this awful old Empress of theirs. I'm just mad about meeting celebrities. I have shaken hands with the King of Italy and with two Cardinals, with Mr. Gladstone and John Sullivan, six Presidents and Barnum's fattest fat lady. My, she *was* fat! I knew Buffalo Bill. I met Brigham Young once. I've been presented, as they call it, to Queen Victoria and at three other Courts in Europe. I couldn't say in an hour all the big-bugs I have met. It is such fun. I'd just love to meet T'zũ Hsi." She pronounced it Sue Hiss.

Thorn caught Elizabeth's eye across an inlaid crystal bowl of Buddha's-fingers, and they both smiled.

The English girl's mouth was pretty when she smiled. Her green-flecked hazel-gray eyes were nicer than he'd thought.

CHAPTER XII

THORN had not meant to come so far. And he had no clear idea of where he was, or of how he was to get back to Peking. The Tartar Wall down there must be five or six miles away.

They had been "seeing" Hai Tien, and he had tired of the women's chatter and had beat a sly retreat without paying much attention to the way he went.

To do Aunt Hilda justice, she did not often rope him into sightseeing. Legation Quarter was more to her liking than Lama temples or Ming tombs. But the Duchess had said that she was going to see the Palace Guards Encampment at Hai Tien to-day, and take a reel or two of photographs; and Mrs. Van Vleck had decided that she would go too; and so had half a score of others, including the woman whose most burning ambition of the moment, shrilly reiterated all the time, was to meet the Empress Dowager. Mr. Lee Wong had been their guide, and the only other man of the party. Thorn had stood it for quite a time, then, seeing a chance, had sneaked away a little meanly, bereft of his manners by the voice of his countrywoman who had shaken hands with two Cardinals and one Fat Lady.

Looking about to get his bearings, if he could, John saw an inconspicuous door in an ornate wall.

It seemed a big place in there, and this evidently was not the main entrance.

Peking looked a long way off, the little he could see of it, its gleaming gaudy roofs beyond the Wall, softened by its distance to a paler blur of rose and lemon, violet-blues and faint greens. What lay behind this wall confronting and halting him here he could only guess. Behind him lay the corkscrew way he had come; to his left swept a world of grain and distant orchards. Mule-bells tinkled from a hill-path and he thought the long irregular line that moved slowly slouching higher across a mountain was a camel caravan. There were grave mounds amid the grain, a pagoda in an orchard, several on the hill-slopes.

There were poppies in the grain, and little scurrying fur-skinned creatures. A laughing-thrush called to him from a wild apricot; a beautifully spotted wildcat hissed at him from the stronghold of a silver ash. A long snake changed its color as it glided near him; and the man did not know that it was harmless, or that there is but one poisonous snake in Chihli.

But he could see nor hear no vestige of human life. There was no one to hail.

It ought to be cooler in there, Thorn thought, as he mopped his brow again with an already overworked handkerchief. The tree-tops showing above the walls, the rowans, red-leafed seedling maples and bamboos growing here and there on the wall itself seemed to promise it. If that door, or any sort of gate, had been open, Thorn would have stepped in to cool off before he faced the heat, for he feared the inevitable stroll back to Hsi Chih Mên. The door was not open, a push proved it firmly fastened. There was no gate in sight.

John threw himself down in the shadow of the wall, greatly to the damage of white duck trousers but much to the satisfaction of his legs.

It was pleasant enough there, if not quite as cool as the tired man would have liked. He liked the smell of roses that came to him over the wall, and the moss and wild verbenas he had stretched on were velvet-soft.

In the distance Peking glowed like a jewel. Its great green patches, its tinier spots of green feathered softly between the sparkling marble terraces, silver threads of smiling water, radiant yellow roofs of the Forbidden City and between the hurried streets, tangled, twisted lanes, huddled buildings, temples red-and-blue roofed, haunted Fox Tower, pagodas and

wall-towers of the outer cities; not less beautiful because a little blurred, of every shade and color, gem-like set in green filigrees and set again in the gray of tower-pointed outer walls. Thorn enjoyed the picture the old city made in the dwindling sunlight. He was only half sorry he had come so far. Perhaps an empty chair, or even a cart, might pass before long that he could hail and get a ride in back to Hsi Chih Mên. He hoped one would; and fell asleep.

It was a very tiny voice that waked him.

Thorn opened his eyes and rubbed them.

A richly dressed man, some rich native, was walking slowly towards the door in the wall. Only a rich man could sport such a costume. Everything about him glittered, from the small painted and embroidered umbrella he carried over him to the tiny fan that hung from his jewel-fastened sash, from his embroidery-encrusted skirt to his jeweled shoes. He carried a bullfinch in a gilded cage.

The mandarin was babbling tenderly to the bird that had disturbed Thorn's siesta. The Manchu gentleman did not happen to be a mandarin just then in office, but John was sure that he must be that at least; no one less than a mandarin could walk about dressed like that even in China. Joseph's coat could not have been so fine, John thought, could not have boasted such long carved ivory buttons, John was sure. Sheba's queen might have coveted this Manchu's long chain of cornelian beads and the gems that dangled from his pouch.

Four servants—John guessed right in that—followed their master at a well-kept distance.

If they saw the white man lying by the park wall, they gave no sign. The master did not see him.

All his attention was given to the little gray bird in its jeweled cage of interlaced gold and ivory.

Thorn jumped up and accosted the gentleman. "Can you tell me who lives in here?"

The American had spoken on equal terms with cattle kings, a bank manager, (temporarily resident in Joliet now) and a millionaire or two; he saw no reason to cringe before a mere Chinese mandarin.

The old Manchu turned slowly and looked gravely at the white man.

"I do," he replied bowing courteously. "My name is Feng Yu. Can I serve you?" The pleasant inclination of his plump and much clothed person was a masterpiece of corpulent agility in one who held up a gaudy umbrella with his right hand, and in his left arm held, almost cuddled affectionately, against his embroidered breast a large bird-cage. And the Manchu's English, if slower and more careful, was as English as Thorn's.

John's first impulse was to reply that he was more or less lost and would appreciate information as to the best short-cut back to Hsi Chih Mên. But a better plan occurred to him, and he instantly took it.

"I hoped you did," he said. "I strolled over hoping to call on Miss Feng. She's a friend of mine. But I can't find the door-bell." Little as he had studied Chinese etiquette since his reluctant arrival in China, the Chicago man knew that Chinese girls did not as a rule receive casual visits from Western men casually. But since his passing from the not infrequent spankings of tenderer years, John Thorn had never been afraid in his life. He certainly was not afraid of all the old men in petticoats and necklaces and fancy hats in China. Perhaps the old party would take him in, perhaps he

would not. It was worth trying. The girl *had* invited him to call. If she'd had no business to—John rather had doubted it at the time—and if it got her into trouble now, it wasn't his fault. If he did get in, so much the better; he was not going back to Peking in all this heat, unless he could find something to go in or on, and waiting in a house or on a shady porch would beat waiting out here like a lizard with the lizards on the sunbaked moss. It might run to drinks inside, you never know—probably not cocktails, but he could do with a cup or two of tea.

Feng Yu's white mustache twitched almost imperceptibly; the only sign of his amusement that the Manchu gave.

"Permit me to escort you to her," Feng Yu said cordially, with a second polite inclination of his silk and satin person. "My daughter is at home and she will be delighted to receive you."

Thorn believed it. But the Chinese father's ready complacency surprised him considerably.

"My name is Thorn, John Thorn of Chicago," he explained.

Feng Yu bowed again; and did not state that he had known that and much more about his daughter's American acquaintance, or that he was more than willing to get into touch himself with the nephew of the close and inseparable friend of the English lady whose husband had been in the English Cabinet.

Without dislocating either bird-cage or umbrella, Feng Yu tapped his breast sharply with his fan; one of his servants ran forward and clapped his hands shrilly.

"We have no door-bells in our country, Mr. Thorn," the host said, drawing courteously aside for John

Thorn to proceed him through the instantly opened door.

The doorkeepers, bowing almost prostrate at their lord's entrance, whatever they felt showed no surprise at their master's unaccustomed companionship. Nor had the servants behind him shown any at the colloquy outside their master's walls. The servants of T'zū Hsi's servant knew that there were strange things afoot in China just now. And while some approved and others did not, all the serving-ones of Feng Yu obeyed.

John Thorn was not the first white man, nor the third, who had gone through that little gray door with Feng Yu. No foreigner had the password here, but several found welcome always.

The Manchu led the way slowly, because he was proud of the pathway that led them to his house.

They went through a long twisted avenue of queerly pierced and twisted rocks. Thorn thought them hideous.

It was the finest avenue of rocks in China. The rocks had cost a gigantic fortune, and some of them had taken a hundred years to shape and chisel by skilfully directed water; water dripping, water beating, water slowly washing away with mathematical precision until the rocks of granite and of soapstone had taken the prescribed wizard-like shapes that made them both beautiful and eloquently significant to Chinese eyes. Water had smoothed them, water had roughened them, water had bent and twisted them, water had pierced them. Through many of the holes that the patiently, dexterously plied streams of water had cut and shaped delicate vines and fragrant flowers had pushed.

The witch-like rocks were set irregularly on each side of the gleaming yellow path. Some of them were small, they differed greatly in size, and in all but grotesqueness differed totally in shape, but none was very large. They marked the path accurately, but did not mask the view or the garden at all.

Dog-tired as he was, Thorn looked about him curiously. A man who deals in Chicago real estate, and who is wise enough to inspect himself what he buys and sells, cannot fail to learn something, if only surface things, of architecture and of garden values. John Thorn called this strange, but it interested him. He came of a quick-eyed people, and it was his habit not only to look but to see. And under an exterior haphazard casualness, which some Americans assume, though with perhaps more of them it is far more than skin-deep, Thorn was thoughtful. His intimacy with Shakespeare, that had so affronted insular little Elizabeth Kent, was but one of his wider-than-Chicago-real-estate interests.

Queer as these Chinese grounds looked to him, he saw at once that every oddity there had intention and meaning. Scores of Europeans privileged to see such Chinese gardens never sense that at all. How many years, how much thought had gone to make it he did not suspect, could not easily have credited. But he saw at once that it meant not only time and money but other bigger things which money can neither give nor buy, and that time can only assist.

He noticed the recurrent rotation of violet beds and rose walls, late-blooming tuberose swathed about the spring-blooming lilacs, and had no doubt that they were planted so that always there should be bloom and color at every season in which any flower would bloom here. That a succession of perfumes had been

planned as carefully he did not suspect. The Chinese love and cherish deep sweet odors as anxiously as they do form and color—especially do the Manchus—and the gardener who does not keep his garden always richly scented, sweet-smelling in the day and at night, is a failure. No rich Chinese would employ him.

He saw that many of the arches they passed, square ones, low ones, tall ones, narrow, wide, oval, round, moon-shaped, each a picture, most a gem, had been put there to frame some special beauty of trees, water, blossoms, sky, distant hill, vista of bamboo path and blue-tiled temple. He thought it all absurdly artificial, over-pompous in its minute artistry, but he owned to himself that a lot of it was lovely, a great deal of it magnificent, all of it incredibly skilful.

They came upon a long stone wall that must have cost a fortune, and that served no purpose at all that Thorn could see; it just stood there, supporting nothing, touching nothing, except the ground beneath it, reaching nothing; it stopped as abruptly at the East as it began at the West. Its two greater lengths were elaborately carved into dolphins riding through bamboos, lions pranking haughtily among rose-trees, turtles and peacocks sunning themselves beside running water, butterflies filming through blossoming wistarias. Except for a cornice of lovely, conventional work, the center of the wall—as Thorn would have called it—was not carved. A line of black and gold "characters" made its only decoration.

John Thorn stood stock-still to study those old Chinese characters. If Lee Wong had been there, he'd have asked him what they meant. "Take the second turning to the left for the fish-pond," probably. But what a rum idea to have it in a private garden! But for that matter, the whole place was rum. And

so was the whole country. Old Feng was the rummest of it all; still carrying his bird-cage, still murmuring love words to the little short-beaked bird now and then.

"You think question what it says," the Manchu suggested courteously.

The American admitted it.

Feng translated. "If you have but two loaves of bread, sell one loaf and buy a lily."

John Thorn grinned, grew suddenly grave and thought it over.

"I like that!" he said quietly, and Feng's fine-cut face glowed frankly at something he heard in the stranger's voice.

The Chicago real estate man did not like China, and he did not care who knew it. But the man who knew Shakespeare's Sonnets had caught a message in the old Chinese saying.

"Yes," he repeated with a thoughtful nod, "I like that— 'If you have two loaves of bread, sell one and buy a lily.' No gospel for the Board of Trade, but a tip-top motto for a garden."

John Thorn had learned more of China from those characters blazoned on an old soapstone wind-screen than most of us who journey there ever learn. But he did not suspect that that old saying was the great essential creed of China—destined perchance to weld and hold the vast tortured Empire and its peoples together, whole, impregnable yet, keeping China China as far in her unwritten future as it has in her storied past—in spite of missionaries, Japan and Christendom.

If you have but two loaves of bread, sell one loaf and buy a lily. It sounds improvident, prodigal. And yet—has it not been written that man shall not live by bread alone?

Bamboos, water, flowers, a hill are essential to every Chinese garden that is more than the scanty blossomed greenery at a peasant hut. Feng Yu's garden lacked none of them. Little as he saw of it on the long twisted journey to the dwelling house, (for a Chinese garden discovers its beauties one at a time and you must explore it to find them) Thorn thought it overdone in water: cascades dashing down between larch and firs, square pools fragrant with lotus; lakes, quiet little streamlets. The country about Peking has not much water. The water-loving Chinese emphasize water in their gardens there.

As they went—leg-tired Thorn hoped they'd get there soon—Feng Yu chatted hospitably with his daughter's visitor. John wondered why the other pitched his voice so low, spoke so softly. It would have amused the American to know that Feng Yu did it in reverence of the flowers and trees, of the lotus-dimpled pools, the tiny streams of running water, the little rushing, tumbling waterfalls; reverence of the delicate anemones and pompous dahlias, the lacy bamboos and heavied fruit-trees; reverence of the radiant gold-drenched blue-blue sky and the far, just snow-touched silver and purple hills.

Three girls were sitting on the marble terrace below the house as Feng and Thorn approached it. Two of them got up hurriedly and ran away giggling. Fee C'ung upset a tray of sweetmeats as she went, and Toon Lin let her lute crash down and did not wait to pick it up. They were Chinese, not Manchus, and they were bound to scurry away at the approach of men. Feng Me-lah looked up from her embroidery-frame with a leisurely smile, and when she saw who it was that came with her father rose and greeted Thorn calmly.

"You are hot and tired, Mr. Thorn John, is it not? Let us sit us in the *k'o-tang*; it makes us more the coolness there."

They threaded two long corridors and crossed several courtyards before they reached the guest-hall.

John Thorn noticed that it was the daughter who led the way, the Manchu father who followed with him.

If the gardens Feng had brought him through had amazed and puzzled Thorn, the Chinese interior disappointed him when at last they had reached the *k'o-tang*. There was so little in it; a long marble-topped teakwood table, perhaps a dozen inlaid teakwood chairs, one great vase on the floor, lanterns pendant from the ceiling, one scroll on the wall, an azalea blooming in a blue pot, a score of tiny dwarf-trees growing in bowls of priceless porcelain; that was all.

Servants brought tea and wine, scented ice shaped like flowers, sweetmeats and tiny sweet cakes. It was Feng Yu who served their guest while Feng Me-lah sat at the cushioned window and chatted to them gaily.

After Mr. Thorn had drunk and eaten, not unwillingly, but could not be persuaded to eat or drink more, Feng Yu with many apologies went away with his birdcage, and left Feng Me-lah and John Thorn alone.

An hour slipped away. The American man enjoyed all of it, the Manchu girl seemed to. And thinking of it afterwards he was amazed to realize how little their talk had differed from talks he'd had time and again with girls he'd called on in Chicago. But he knew that he should remember most that Miss Feng had said to him longer and more clearly than he often had remembered what American girls said.

That was queer! Was it the strangeness of the Chinese environment, or was it something in the

Manchu girl herself? She was rather lovely, when your eyes grew used to her remarkable clothes, lovely and not half so unlike many girls he had known at home as all the Chinese girls he'd noticed were.

Where had the old gentleman gone, John wondered. Strange of him to leave the girl alone like this with a Western barbarian who was an absolute stranger into the bargain. It wasn't the brand of paternal etiquette he'd looked for in China, or had heard reported. He wondered if Feng Yu had not slipped back through some hidden panel and behind a screen or vase was listening to every word they said.

Feng Yu was not. Feng Yu was very importantly engaged in a far room, superintending his favorite bullfinch's bath.

Pe-tee loved his bath, but Feng Yu loved to watch it even more.

Pe-tee the bullfinch was a bird of great importance. No bullfinch in Chihli had greater fame as a songster. Several times he had been privileged to sing to T'zŭ Hsi herself. And she had praised him!

Pe-tee's daily promenade was never neglected. The bird that gets no change of scene loses voice and spirit; becomes a second or third-rate performer. Even in Peking's cruel winter Pe-tee went out in state at mid-day, if only for a quarter of a Chinese hour—unless the Storm-god belched a hurricane; and then Pe-tee was carried, cage and all, from room to room, through corridor after corridor, carried with many tender apologies for the day's preposterous inclemency and with earnest assurances that the storm-enforced confinement should be made up to him and then made up again at the first auspicious hour when the Sun-god had returned to Peking's heaven.

Feng Yu did not always himself take Pe-tee for that

pampered feathered-one's daily jaunt. But Feng did very often, and Feng Yu made a point of not missing Pe-tee's bath, if such neglect of his tiny favorite could be avoided. He would show Mr. Thorn every respect and cordiality *after* he had served Pe-tee and attended Pe-tee's leisurely ablutions. Until then Feng Me-lah could be trusted to offer every rite of hospitality. Feng Ta Jen considered that John Thorn's lines had fallen in exceedingly pleasant places. Feng Me-lah had had some sufficient reason for inviting the Western gentleman to visit her, or some sufficient impulse. Let her entertain him then. Feng Me-lah's father reflected proudly that he knew no one better skilled to do it. Chinese hospitality is unbounded, almost never slurred or scanted. His should not be, and presently, in his own good time and in Pe-tee's, he would return to the *k'o-tang* and add again his welcome to Feng Me-lah's.

"Eminent maker of most exquisite song-music, I entreat thee to come forth," Feng Yu said tenderly as he opened the door of the ornate cage, and placed it gently on the floor, squatting down beside it to wait the finch's pleasure.

Pe-tee was in no haste to descend into the outer world.

He marched up and down his gilded perches. He sharpened his beak, fluttered his brown wings, then paid great attention to his claws. Pe-tee of the great house of Feng was dandy as well as maestro.

Feng Yu hummed a gentle song. Pe-tee paid no attention; which was excusable, for Feng Yu at his best and tunefulest could not sing half as well as Pe-tee could at his worst.

The man waited patiently, squatting deferentially on the ground.

The bird eyed him indifferently.

Feng Yu, pretending equal indifference, took up the tablets at his girdle and studied them with absorption.

This time the man scored. Not even out of the corner of an eye did he watch Pe-tee; with nearly half an eye Pe-tee watched Feng Yu. Feng knew that a little feathered body was swelling with curiosity. It always intrigued his bullfinch to see him writing on his tablets. Feng drew a brush-pen from its brocade case at his girdle, ink-slab and ink-cake from their box, and began to write delicate minute characters on an ivory tablet.

Pe-tee broke into song.

Feng Yu wrote on.

Pe-tee flew out, still singing lustily.

Feng idly snapped the cage door shut, not seeming to know he did so, without glancing up from his tablet.

Pe-tee fluttered back sharply to the top of his cage, clutched it securely with his feet, tested one gilded bamboo with a determined angry beak; gave that up for the sheer waste of time and beak it was, and scolded Feng Yu violently. Even in his rage Pe-tee's voice was strangely sweet. Feng Yu smiled a little under his white mustache, but went on writing, and did not glance up.

Pe-tee cocked his tiny head daintily, shook it crossly and flew about the room, pausing to investigate a leopard-azalea in a K'ang Hsi porcelain tub that might have disclosed a worm but did not. Off winged the finch to sharpen his squat beak on the gold ridge of a crimson-lacquer cabinet.

A string of ivory and mother-o'-pearl love-bells was threaded at an open window. Off went Pe-tee to shake it into creamy elfin music. A butterfly flew in through

the open lattice. Pe-tee chased it across the room, up and down the room. Which flew the prettier, which was the prettier? Feng Yu wondered, brushing a character more carelessly than a scholarly Chinese ever should; for he had looked up at last to watch the pretty sport. The butterfly was not frightened, Pe-tee was not in earnest; playmates they, not antagonists. Together they were irresistible.

When the lovely tiny creature of blue, green and velvet black flew away again out of the painted window the bird perched him on the open casement and trilled "good-by" and "come-again-sometime."

Feng went on with his fine brush-work more carefully. Pe-tee would not fly out into the roofless courtyard. If Pe-tee did, one sharp whistle would bring him trundling back on eager wings. But the little blue-gray thing did not go. Pe-tee wished his bath every bit as much as Feng Yu wished to give it.

Bereft of his playmate, the bullfinch swam across to where Feng sat squatted on the floor, and lit on the man's brocade shoulder with a friendly, ingratiating "cheep-cheep."

Feng Yu lifted up his brush-free left hand and caressed the tiny red-breasted finch absently.

Pe-tee studied the tablet sagely, wearied of it, and pecked peremptorily at Feng Yu's face.

"So," Feng laughed, "you would be made a clean-one. Come then, this thy servant will make the honorable bathtub ready for thine own tardy readiness." Feng, when he had cleaned and dried his brush, put it in its brocade case, closed his tablets and took his pet's implements of toilet out of their box of lead and coral that was ready to his hand on a low ebony table.

It was indeed an honorable bathtub! A square,

deep three-footed dish of Sung K'ang Hsi ware; the opalescent glaze of its outer surface decorated with squat fishes standing fatly out in red-fired biscuit. Its lining of pale rose jade was smooth and rounded, lest in his water-sporting the priceless songster, and more beloved than priceless, should hurt a tender feather against a corner's sharpness.

From a long-spouted gourd-shaped ewer of inestimably valuable Ch'êng Hua's unmatched turquoise and green, the mandarin slowly filled the jade-lined bath-pool. The clear silvery water made a pretty gurgled music of its own as it fell. Pe-tee listened with approval.

Feng Yu put down the priceless ewer, and tested the water with a careful, sensitive finger.

"It is of coolness delicious," the man told his bird. "Wilt condescend to bathe thee now, my golden-throated?"

Feng held up a dripping finger; Pe-tee perched on it amiably, and was lowered so into the rose-scented water. And Feng the Manchu courtier, experienced diplomat, valued councilor of China's great, indomitable Dowager, crouched dotting and watched the bird fluttering with all its pretty vigor in the perfumed water.

Pe-tee did not hurry. Again and again he perched on the tub's edge, shook his wings hard, and then plunged back head-down into the bath. Feng Yu was in no hurry either. While it pleased Pe-tee to preen and flute himself in the water, it delighted and engrossed Feng Yu to watch Pe-tee do it.

They were both very serious about it all.

But when Pe-tee flew away at last, telling that the rite was over, and flying sprinkled well Feng Yu, the man laughed and chuckled like a child.

It was some time before the little bird came back and perched him this time on Feng's knee. Standing there Pe-tee trilled a liquid, silver song of gratitude and love while Feng Yu pressed gentle finger tips over and among all the tiny feathers to find if Pe-tee were adequately dry.

When the finch tucked his black head under his gray wing suggestively, Feng Yu heaped a shallow cup of almost translucent jade with fine millet, filled an ampler one with fresh un-perfumed water, and placed the jade cups in the bird-cage.

Pe-tee hopped off on to the carpet.

Feng Yu rose.

The bird chirruped "good night" cheerfully.

Feng Yu spoke it tenderly, and went from the room with many a fond look at his pet-one, leaving Pe-tee standing on the carpet, near the open bird-cage. Pe-tee might elect to perch him for the night in his gilded, well-victualled cage; he might choose to sleep on the tall crimson lily in the Hung Chih flower-bowl or on the shoulder of the room-god,—all favorite sleep-mats of Pe-tee the bullfinch.

But the mandarin closed the open casement and secured it, before he went, that no prowler of the night, bat or dwarf-owl, might disturb Pe-tee as Pe-tee slumbered.

Thorn had no idea how late it was when the guest-tea came, and Feng Yu returned with it. Nor did Thorn know that guest-tea bade a guest go. And not knowing the social enormity he was committing, Mr. Thorn of Chicago lingered on quite a little longer in the *k'o-tang* of Feng the Manchu. He was enjoying himself greatly, and, for another thing, it would not look well to clear off the minute his host reappeared.

If the old chap had been listening, he did not seem

to have been displeased at anything he'd overheard. He was every bit as friendly as he'd been when he greeted John at the gate and piloted him through the old garden's tangled mazes to the vestal presence of his only daughter. At least, Thorn supposed she was the only one; there didn't seem to be any others about, and he had heard of none. And Thorn began to suspect that Manchu girls brought their fathers up almost as well as American girls did.

That was an eye-opener.

Indeed Thorn doubted how many Chicago fathers of his acquaintance would have accepted quite as pleasantly a chance Chinese visitor whom he never had seen or heard tell of in his life before, or have left him alone with the girl so simply and so long, after he had fed him, as Mr. Feng had left him with Miss Feng. Come to that, John Thorn could think of several fathers on each of the three sides of the Chicago River who might not have offered a daughter's chance Chinese caller tea, cake or candies. By George, no; not so much as a tumbler of ice-water.

"Well, I must be off," Thorn said at last. Feng Me-lah bowed and smiled, but Feng Yu voiced his sharp distress.

Miss Feng took up a book and unrolled it as Thorn reached the door-panel, but Feng the father tramped back all the way to the outer gate with their guest.

At the gate a luxurious rickshaw was waiting—almost the only one in Peking. The pull-man and two push-men squatting, smoking contentedly, in the path beside it wore the coolie livery of Feng Yu. They got up quickly when they saw that their Ta Jen himself had come to the wall-door.

Thorn was grateful for that rickshaw, and said so. He did not add that he might have gone sooner if he

had known that he was not going to have to walk back to the *Hôtel de Pékin*.

"There is always welcome for you in my home," the Manchu said as if he meant it, while the rickshaw coolies were knotting their drip-pads more securely. "Come to see *me* some time. It would pleasure me to converse with you of Washington while we smoked together and admired my peonies. I found great satisfaction in your city of Washington when I was there a young man. I thought it the most comfortable and the most beautiful of your Fu cities. Miss Feng will enjoy your distinguished society, and I shall rejoice to have her the profit and culture of it whenever you will present her with it. But I also will be heartfelt glad of your society in my own apartments where the women-ones come not."

John Thorn doubted if there was any crevice of that great house into which Feng Me-lah did not go, when and how she wished. But he only said that he certainly would call again.

Feng Yu went back to Feng Me-lah but stayed beside her but a moment, though they both sighed a little that it was no more.

When Thorn barely had left them Feng Yu commanded his chair. And because it was his best green chair, because they wore their best liveries, the chair-bearers knew that Feng Yu was going to the Summer Palace. Feng Me-lah knew that her father had had no summons but was going unbidden and at an unaccustomed hour to T'zū Hsi. She had little doubt that even so the Old Buddha would grant him audience, and that it would be private audience.

Thorn had a good deal to tell that night, and he told it glibly, of his visit to Miss Feng.

"Queer sort of fancy rock all over the place . . . gave me tea twice, tea when I got in, more tea when I left . . . and the cocktails were all right . . . nice old boy, if it hadn't been for his clothes . . . speaks English like a top . . . traveled a lot . . . knows Europe like a book . . . been in Washington and New York . . . learned old fellow, and mighty observing . . . spoke of the old Knickerbocker families. What do you think of that, Aunt Hilda? . . . knows all about your husband, Duchess. Says he was the ablest man in your Cabinet . . . wishes there was something he could do to give you a good time over here, Duchess. . . . thinks Queen Victoria is It. . . ."

The Duchess was pleased. Mrs. Van Vleck was delighted. Even Elizabeth was interested.

But none of them dreamed—not even the Duchess, steeped almost all of her years in the social subtleties of diplomacy—not one of them dreamed that they already were half-way on the road of their greatly desired visit to the Empress Dowager of China.

CHAPTER XIII

LADY MARY looked up from the bridge table with open dismay when the boy pulled back the portière of sandalwood and blue-glass beads and announced, "One same Clistan joss-man come see."

She could cope with Samuel Simons, she could cope with any missionary she ever had met. But she knew from long, sore experience that it took time and persistent exertion to rout Mr. Simons. The creature ignored hints, and met open abuse with an offensive

calmness that he wore as the sacred badge of all his ministering tribe. Samuel Simons carried himself as meekly as Uriah Heep, and at the same time with a sort of holy arrogance, and assurance, but granite was soft and malleable compared to his persistence. It was atrocious of him to call without an appointment.

"Give Mr. Simons a chair, and bring him a cocktail," she told Pig Fan severely, scarcely lifting her angry eyes from her cards.

The missionary helped himself to a seat. "I do not touch alcohol, ma'am, I never have. Liquor is poison to the human soul."

Lady Mary sipped her own cocktail, before she studied her cards. Then she lit a fresh cigarette.

"Don't smoke either, do you?"

"Indeed no. I disapprove of tobacco severely."

"Ever try opium?"

Mr. Samuel Simons lifted his hands in pained expostulation.

"Quite nice stuff, I call it," his reluctant hostess said carelessly. "I leave it to you, partner."

Mr. Simons sat quite still and waited, a neatly gloved hand on either knee, a smile of patient endurance and entire forgiveness on his smug face. He knew he was good, and that self-knowledge (satisfactory to himself, if to few others) oozed from his well-washed countenance like some sickly incense. He knew that he was right in all he did or said or thought, and knew that most of these soft-clad worldlings here, gambling away the afternoon hours of God's blessed sunshine, drinking cocktails, smoking, erred in almost all they spoke, thought or did. But he loved them all; he pitied and forgave them; he prayed for them,

should continue to pray for them; he would pluck them away from the evil they chose whenever he could. Some at least of them, his dear astray friends, he was confident that sooner or later, all in Providence's appointed time, he should be able to save. And his eyes, watching them sadly but lovingly, said so as clearly as a high-pitched, resonant voice could have said it.

There were few open personal animosities in social European-Peking. There were too few Europeans, and they lived too close. You had to keep friends, if only for your own comfortable convenience, with all the others most of whom you saw every day, all of whom you were sure to rub up against once or more every week. You had, if only in decent good manners, to pretend to like everyone else; pretend it so long and so well that in a shallow sense you came really to do it. And in most of winter it was too cold, and in almost all of summer too hot to love or to hate at high pressure.

But no one had come to like Mr. Simons. What the Chinese who encountered him (and a good many had to) thought of him is another story—perhaps. But in Legation Quarter Samuel Simons easily was the most hated man thing in Peking.

The British and the Americans hated him most; for he belonged to them both, and both were ashamed that he did. One of his parents—both missionaries before him—had been English, one an American. For the rest, he was not bad looking, and except concerning the Orient he was not without education. Little as he knew of China, except that he had been born to save it, it was said now and then that he knew quite a good deal about Chinese ivories, jades, ceramics and

embroideries. Perhaps that was why—that and a soft persistence of his own hard to combat—he had succeeded in slipping his way quietly a little into Legations society. He was a widower. He seemed not to be without some private means. There were Chinese who said, perhaps some Europeans who thought it, that he, as his father had before him, found several ways to make his own particular “pidgen” pay.

Of late he affected Lady Mary Norton’s occasional companionship with persistent regularity. Legations had noticed that she did not always repulse him either. She had been seen to call at the missionary’s house more than once. They had been caught in earnest converse on Chair Lane. Legations had chuckled and made the most of it.

But this was the first time that Mr. Simons had injected himself into one of Lady Mary’s bridge afternoons.

“I believe the creature has some hold over Mary,” a woman whispered to an attaché. They both giggled.

It was true. The Rev. Mr. Simons did have a very firm hold on Lady Mary Norton. But—on her part, at least—it was not scandalous. Lady Mary was a very merry widow indeed, but she had no affinity platonic or warmer for Mr. Samuel Simons. He served a purpose very dear to her at the moment, pandered to her ruling passion of the hour. That was all. Quite enough too, the Legation Quarter thought.

Simons intended to marry again. He considered it his duty to his Cause that the lady of his next selection should be not altogether unmonied. But he would have been no more willing to marry Lady Mary Norton than she would have been to wed with him. Lady Mary served a purpose dear to him, but he did not admire her.

He did admire Miss Kent.

He had not selected his new wife yet—but he was searching and considering.

One thing was settled; the second Mrs. Samuel Simons would be much his junior. His first wife had been several years his senior—a most admirable woman, missionary and helpmeet; but the difference in ages was going to be the other way about this next time.

Decidedly he approved and admired Miss Elizabeth Kent. He liked her low, quiet voice, the grave intelligence of the girl's hazel-gray eyes. He wondered if she were dependent upon her aunt the Duchess of Charnley. He hoped that she was not.

Elizabeth was not playing. Neither was Mr. Lee Wong. Quite a few who were there were not playing. John Thorn was not. Thorn disliked bridge. He considered it unendurably flat compared to poker—as inferior to poker as cricket and golf were to football. Lee Wong liked bridge. He liked every game of chance, and he liked every game of skill. Bridge, combining both, appealed to him greatly. But he made it a rule not to play with Westerns games of chance that required skill because it was almost a difficulty not to win almost invariably. And any self-rule that Lee Wong made, Lee Wong kept. Elizabeth was stupid at all card games.

Elizabeth stood idly at the open verandah window, Lee on one side of her, Thorn on the other.

Mr. Simons rose, not at all awkwardly, and moved towards the long verandah window.

Elizabeth bit her lip. She scarcely knew that Samuel Simons existed—indeed to her he did not exist—but although they had met only twice, she knew that he admired her. A girl always knows—even an English

girl as chillily impersonal to all not of her own circle. She knew that Mr. Simons was coming to talk to her. Help! She half turned to John Thorn; but, no, she would not ask or hint even so small a service of him. Lee Wong then? Well, why not, there was no one else near enough.

"Let us go into the garden, Mr. Lee," she said a little desperately. Simons had almost reached them. "I have something to tell you," the girl added raising her voice deliberately. "No, Mr. Thorn, you are not to come. I am going to have a confidential talk with Mr. Lee Wong. No one is to come with us or to disturb us."

Thorn smiled and bowed a little mockingly. He had had no intention of playing three to that Anglo-Chinese two.

Lee Wong smiled and bowed gratefully. And the American saw that Lee Wong's slant-eyes were sparkling. Thorn did not like that. After all, the girl was here with her aunt, his aunt's intimate friend, and Elizabeth Kent was young and inexperienced. He did not like her singling out a Chinese man in that marked way, and going out into the empty garden to talk to him confidentially—goodness knew about what. She had done it to avoid Simons, of course. But she would far better have turned to him for an escort in flight. His eyes would not have sparkled but he'd have seen her through. A *tête-à-tête* with a Chinese man, who too was a sort of servant of her aunt's, out in Lady Mary's secluded garden was bad taste on any white girl's part—to put it at its mildest. Thorn half turned to follow Miss Kent and Lee Wong—but—why should he? He'd only get snubbed for his kindness, probably. Let them go; it was not up to him. He bit his lip, and turned back again, and found himself con-

fronted by the ingratiating smile of Mr. Samuel Simons.

"Thank you," Lee Wong said as he pulled back a flower-heavy clematis from Miss Kent's path.

"But I haven't anything to tell you, really, Mr. Lee," Elizabeth confessed with a little less than her usual self-assurance.

"I know that, Miss Kent," the Chinese said with a quiet smile. "I did not thank you in anticipation of an interesting confidence, and not even for letting me get from the stuffy room into this much pleasanter place, though I was doubly glad to come."

"What did you thank me for then?" Elizabeth only asked because she thought he'd have no answer ready, and was lazily curious to know how good an answer he'd make up.

"I thanked you for letting me be of a small service to you, Miss Kent. If you had strolled out here alone, the person you wished to avoid would have followed you, as no doubt you knew. Thank you for enduring a few moments with me rather than a more instructive half hour with Mr. Simons." Lee Wong ended with a low ceremonious bow.

And then they both laughed.

Nothing more was said about Simons. Lee Wong would not labor the subject of her semi-countryman, and Elizabeth Kent would not criticize more plainly to any Oriental any white man, not even one whom she disliked as much as she did the Anglo-American missionary.

Now that she had dragged Lee Wong out here she scarcely could either snub or ignore him. What in the world, she wondered, was she to talk to him about?

Perhaps Lee Wong divined her difficulty, for he at once set himself to amuse her. And he succeeded

so well that Elizabeth Kent never suspected that she had squandered a long three-quarters of an hour with a Chinese man in Lady Mary's garden.

Still less did she realize that her dislike of China and the Chinese had received a strong blow. But she did realize that she did not dislike her aunt's Chinese teacher. His manners were admirable; become so, no doubt, through Oriental imitativeness, and his constant association with the well-bred Westerns culled from the aristocracies of many nations to make up the bouquet of Legations society.

If Elizabeth had compunction about snubbing Lee Wong, in ungracious return for the use she made of him, John Thorn had none in snubbing Mr. Samuel Simons.

Simons greeted Thorn beamingly and spoke him fair.

The Chicago man replied with a monosyllable, turned on his heel and threaded his way across the room.

Others were scarcely more cordial. Truly the way of the foreign missionary is hard when he chooses to hew it through the social preserves of Western non-missioners in the East. Patience needs to be the badge of all his tribe. Over-exercised, too often prommeled and pommeled too hard, sweet patience coarsens and hardens into very thick skin. Mr. Simons lingered on. He would neither bridge nor drink nor smoke, but still less would he go.

Meanly no one offered him tea.

Perhaps Lady Mary would if he stayed long enough. Whether she did or not, he had come there to say something to her, and here he should stay until he had.

And Lady Mary did—at long last, when almost everyone else had gone.

"She is actually feeding the brute," a girl laughed.

Lady Mary was doing more. She poured his tea herself, and two or three saw her face suddenly soften and glow at something Mr. Simons said over the rim of his cup. And low as Simons spoke, a quick-eared attaché caught the words, and in his surprise gave an end of his blond moustache a slow nervous tug.

What Mr. Haskett overheard was: "I have found it. You shall have it at last."

"Not a word to anyone else," Lady Mary answered excitedly.

"Certainly not. It is *our* secret."

"You are a dear man. I'll come to-morrow night."

CHAPTER XIV

ON Great Felicity Street Thorn sensed that someone was following him. He turned sharply and saw that it was Lee Wong. Lee quickened his silent pace, came on to the American, and fell into step as nearly as padded Chinese shoes can match the gait of American boots.

Thorn returned the other's greeting not cordially. It nettled him to be joined so without any pretense of "by-your-leave." His crude provincial dislike of being seen in apparent comradeship with a yellow-skinned skirt-clad still persisted after months in Peking. It nettled him to have to stroll along a public thoroughfare so accompanied. He looked about for a shop he might enter on some pretended errand for his aunt or quest of his own. There was no such shop here. If there had been, it was even chances, he thought, that Lee would have volunteered to go into it with

him as interpreter and to barter for him more intelligently and successfully than the American himself could do. For all he could see, it was walk on in Lee's unwelcome company, or turn away abruptly and markedly from the Chinese whom his aunt liked and affected, or snub the Chinese so severely that Lee himself would turn and go.

Thorn hesitated and fumbled his small ill-natured dilemma.

"Did you wish to speak with me about anything?" he asked as they walked on side by side, Eastern petticoat and trousering of the West pushed familiarly close in the crush of the crowded, narrow street.

Lee Wong just smiled. He read the other's thought, but he did not resent it. It was absurd that a White interloper should wince a little at being seen with a Chinese gentleman on a Peking street, ridiculous that a nomad man, dressed as only women should dress, was embarrassed by the companionship of a properly clad resident; but it was worth neither emotion nor rebuke. Lee Wong was used to just such ill-veiled White stupidity and vanity, as many Chinese of even higher rank than his and of older age were used to it here.

"If I may," he replied easily.

They strolled on, comfortably enough now and then, oftener jostled by the narrow way's teeming human counter-streams.

Lee Wong chatted pleasantly as they went, when the human density about them did not make it impossible. But he spoke casually of casual things. He seemed in no haste to say anything of the least consequence, if he had anything that mattered at all to say to John Thorn.

Thorn did not notice how carefully Lee Wong

scanned each Chinese that came near them. John Thorn did not suspect that Lee was a trifle anxious—anxious for the American he liked and who he knew did not like either him or his race. John Thorn had no glimmering thought that Lee Wong was bent on protecting him, should the occasion arise to do it.

The narrow street dwindled into a leafy lane, less crowded, prettier if less interesting. Beyond a tiny temple whose yellow roof-tiles, unsuspected by the indifferent American, proclaimed it under Imperial protection, the lane widened into one of those green bits of open country that intersperse here and there Peking's densest quarters.

Lee Wong breathed more freely, his eyes grew lazier, less alert, but his manner did not alter at all.

Presently Lee Wong spoke, not less quietly but more gravely.

"Mr. Thorn," he said, looking directly in the other's face, "I wish that your ladies would leave Peking. Our climate is trying for them now, dangerous even. It will be so increasingly until after the New Year. I wish that your aunt and her English friends, the Duchess of Charnley and Miss Kent, would continue their journeys. It would be wisest, I am sure."

"Wish they would!" Thorn spoke more cordially than he had since Lee Wong had joined him willy-nilly. "I have no idea when the Duchess will go, but I am more than willing that my aunt should. And that's just what she won't do. Peking's the most fascinating place she's seen yet,"—Lee Wong grinned softly—"she says, and she is not leaving it just yet."

"I wish you would make her. They have been in Northern China long enough."

"I have," Thorn laughed. "Fine place, Mr. Lee, one of the best,"—Lee Wong knew that the American

did not think so, but liked him for implying that he did—"but there's a lot of things I'd like to be doing at home. Every man's country suits him best, anyway. Lake Michigan will look pretty good to me next time I see it. I shall enjoy the smell of the Stock Yards. I'd enjoy it this moment."

Breath of attar came to them across a meadow of barley and apricots, across a field of beans and a patch of bee-buzzed clover; but John Thorn meant what he said, and he did not exaggerate.

"But," he went on, "as for making Aunt Hilda do anything, I or anyone else ever born! I say, did you ever know a woman you could *make* do anything?"

Lee Wong smiled.

"Perhaps *you* do, though," John conceded, remembering where he was. "Your women obey you, don't they? Ours don't, not one of them, ever. Lucky lot, you men over here where women obey."

"They are supposed to," Lee laughed. "That is a slight international exaggeration, though. Women are very much alike everywhere, I believe. They get their own way usually, I think. Their methods of getting it vary with longitude and latitude, vary in different castes and circles, but the results are much the same. But," the quiet Chinese voice grew grave again and Lee's tone urgent, "we have our methods too, we who are men, and there are times, occasions when we should push them, push them with requisite force, if gentler ways that we like better to employ will not answer. Make the three ladies go on *now* to Japan, better still to India, or go home, Mr. Thorn. At least make Miss Kent go—at once."

John whistled. "Christopher Columbus, you grow funnier and funnier, Lee. Me make Miss Kent go! Lots of influence I've got in that quarter. English

girls are not as openly perky about it—those I have met—as our girls at home are, but I suspect they can be every bit as set. Miss Elizabeth Kent can, if I'm any judge. Tell me, Lee, *why* do you wish the two aunts and Miss Kent to clear out of here?" He did not add, "And what's it to you, anyway?" but his eyes did.

"The ladies have given me much kindness," Lee Wong said gravely. "I have given them my friendship," he said simply. "I wish them to go from here, before the hotter months come, because I like them greatly and sincerely, Mr. Thorn."

Thorn studied the perfume-belching bean field darkly for several moments.

They went on together slowly.

"Look here, Mr. Lee Wong, there is more to it than you say. What's up?"

"I can say only what I have said," Lee Wong replied firmly—a little sadly, too, Thorn thought. "They must go. Take them away. *Make* them go. Especially make Miss Kent, the young English girl, go."

Thorn's mouth sat stiffly. He had not liked Elizabeth, not much; but he resented the Chinese man's reiterated interest in her.

"Why, especially Miss Kent?" he demanded tersely.

"She is young," Lee answered quietly. "She is not here altogether at her own wish, I think. She does not wish to stay. She longs for England. Our hottest moons are on us now. They are a burning pestilence, and poison unacclimatized Westerns. The young feel it most, are most apt to sicken, and even to die in Chihli. Miss Kent is the most endangered here of your three ladies."

Beyond that Lee Wong would not be drawn. He

had said more than his own Chinese conscience could quite approve. Perhaps he had gone nearer disloyalty than one of his great clan had in centuries.

Thorn wondered, but Lee Wong would not satisfy him.

As they strolled on, and for days after, John searched the riddle hard and read no inkling of its answer. So little did many older eyes than his, eyes skilled too, as Thorn's eyes were not, in searching into the intricacies of Chinese riddles, read then the writing on Peking's Wall.

CHAPTER XV

AS Lee Wong and Thorn turned an abrupt twist in their scarcely indicated path—moss and stones just a little footworn—they came upon some score of absorbed peasants gathered about a story-teller whose carpet was spread at the roots of a great banyan tree at the side of a field of jute and melons.

The strolling artist was recounting one of the myriad Chinese versions of the old, world-wide story that in China, by wayside, on brushed or printed page, in the actor's high booth, is the favorite of all the stories ever told or heard: the story of the Prodigal Son.

It is devotion of parent to child not less than devotion of child to parent that has held China knit and sweet for thousands of years, and perhaps may for thousands of years to come. In the West we hear more of Chinese filialness than ever is told there of the loyalty and forbearance of Chinese parents to those

who descend from them into the fever we call life; probably because the devotion and obedience of Chinese children (be their age what it may) astonishes us, while the devotion and self-sacrifice of Chinese parents does not. Fathers and mothers love their young, and suffer for them gladly the wide world over. Rachel mourns for her children, Cornelia counts herself jeweled in hers, Virginius loves Virginia to the terrible, tender sacrifice of slaughter, David loves Absalom to the utmost bitterness and shame of the sorry end, on throne, in hovel, wherever men and women are human; China has no monopoly in that. The pelican that feeds her hungering young with the life-blood they beak from her breast, the woman that welcomes the pangs of childbirth are of no time, no country. Western children can boast but poorly a lesser filialness than almost every Chinese child wears—wears as a matter of course, no more to be boasted of or praised than its garment of skin.

But again and again in China's long story children have erred and strayed and their parents have forgiven, condoned and re-embraced them. No Chinese ever can hear a Prodigal Son story too often.

This strolling story-teller was telling it well. He paid no attention to Lee and Thorn as they came to the edge of the listening crowd and paused there. No one paid them any attention, except the quick eyes of the teller's apprentice-boy squatted beside his master's pay-bowl. He threw them a shrewd look—they and their garments—and would have glided to them swiftly and noiselessly had they moved away. Already the others had paid. A Chinese story-teller does not begin his recital until his pay-bowl is adequately plenished. But late comers must pay before they go. To see that they do is part of the apprentice's office.

This was a recounter of some quality. Many wear faded if not even tattered garments, have no apprentice, must pass and press their own pay-bowl. This man was finely clad, his hand wore a jewel, his girdle dangled a snuff-bottle of coral, his coat buttons were carved and whole.

There was no other sound as he spoke. His hearers seemed not to breathe. Even the old banyan tree seemed listening. Lee Wong was listening too—listening thirstily, Thorn noticed with a smile—Lee who must have heard it a thousand times. Thorn himself had seen scores of such story-tellers at work on the Peking streets, at house gates, shop doors, near tea-gardens and markets.

Without a gesture, with a face that did not move, a body as still as a grave-mound stone, the teller told it—told it all with only the eloquence of voice, eyes and words and the eloquence of the Chinese minds and hearts of those who heard. It was eloquence enough.

As they approached the hushed group in the banyan's wide shade, Lee instantly had known what tale the itinerant was reciting. Lee had whispered "Prodigal Son" to the American. With that clue Thorn could follow it all now. He saw a young Chinese leave his father, truculently taking with him half of all that father had, leaving his father to mourn. He saw the Prodigal waste his substance on flower-boats, drinking, gambling, carousing in the flowery-quarter of a far city's bedizened frail ones. He saw famine come and grind the wastrel until, ragged, beaten and hungry, he fought mongrel pariah dogs in the gutter for crusts they had filched from hovel garbage. He saw the starveling limp across China towards home, penitent. He saw the Chinese father standing at their

home door, shielding his tender, brooding eyes from the sunset with a trembling hand, watching, watching the road his son had gone, watching and longing as he had since his son had gone. He saw the old eyes light at last, the old limbs quiver, as the father ran to meet the son; saw the father greet the son and lead him home. He saw the servants scurry at their master's sharp command; saw the feast spread—fragrant meats, white rice, cakes rich and delicate, wine spiced and warm, priceless almond-tea in priceless Swatow bowls; saw the musicians and the dance-girls come to mark the joy and triumph; saw the robe of ceremony and the cap of festival put on the prodigal when the father himself had washed the son's torn, bruised feet, soothed them, clad them gently in fine white stockings and easy padded shoes of embroidered silk!

It was the necromancy of art. Art in the East!

Tears ran on Chinese faces. Lee Wong's eyes swam. John Thorn had a lump in his throat.

Was Elizabeth Kent laughing at him?

Elizabeth was, but in girlish, if mean, disguise of her own emotion. But Thorn did not know that. She was a minx—and he was an ass!

He had not seen her and the inevitably-together aunts until the apprentice had jingled the pay-bowl demandingly at him. Then, the tension of the story broken a little, Thorn had looked about him and had seen that a group of Europeans stood some distance away at the other side of the Chinese listeners—his aunt, the Duchess and her niece, an attendant batch of attachés. He thought that only Elizabeth Kent had spied him. He made believe to have seen none of them, deposited a dollar in the gayly if coarsely lacquered bowl, and turned to go without seeing them.

Lee Wong frustrated him.

"The ladies! We must get them away from here." Lee spoke almost imperatively. "They must leave Peking," he added under his breath as Thorn not too willingly went with him around the still-seated crowd to where his aunt and the others stood not of it but near it.

Aunt Hilda was wiping her eyes. The English woman's face was aglow.

"Come on home now?" Mrs. Van Vleck snapped indignantly. "Certainly not! He is going to do another. What a darling he is. Lend me your handkerchief, Jack; I've soaked mine. I told you so; he is going to do another. They haven't budged, the audience, and see, they are paying again; that's a sure sign. He makes them pay before he'll open his lips. I shan't budge either. Give me some money, John. I've put my last cent in his basin already. I only had one; we'd been to an ivory shop as we came."

Three of the seated listeners rose, gave the White group glowering scrutiny, and came arrogantly nearer. Hakka soldiers, their dress proclaimed them.

One of the Hakkas spoke aloud to his fellows; they answered with an ugly, guttural grunt and a stare of open dislike at Elizabeth Kent.

If none of the Europeans had caught or understood what the Hakka had said, Lee Wong had. He moved on them, standing in front of Miss Kent, and spoke to them in their own tongue. They scowled at Lee ominously; but they made no other answer, and they fell back a pace or two, but stood their ground so, watching the Europeans surlily.

Lee spoke again, then ignored them and turned to the Duchess.

No one else heard what he said to her. She raised her eyebrows—in scorn or in anger, Thorn wondered—then turned with a shrug and a laugh and thrust a firm hand in Hilda Van Vleck's arm.

"I've had enough of this, Hilda. It's a long tramp back. And I want my tea."

Mrs. Van Vleck sighed disappointedly, but she let her friend lead her away.

Lee Wong sighed with relief—that the Duchess of Charnley had prevailed where he had failed.

Elizabeth followed her aunt as a matter of course. Lee Wong moved close to Miss Kent and went beside her so.

Two attendant attachés were indignant and looked it. But the third and older who had been in China longer merely looked grave and went close on the other side of Elizabeth Kent.

John Thorn too was indignant, but he took care not to show it. Miss Kent was no great favorite of his; but she was white, English, a girl and the niece of Aunt Hilda's special friend; it annoyed him to see any Chinese take open social possession of Elizabeth.

And yet—again he wondered, whatever was up?

Elizabeth and the sturdy Duchess were going as they had come, on foot. They always were "perishing for exercise" here in China, they assured Mrs. Van Vleck, who heard it rather petulantly. And the two English women took it, whenever and however they could get it. Hotter suns than China's would not have deterred them.

Mrs. Van Vleck was not walking. She never walked, if any way of avoiding it could be devised.

The others stood about her chair while she was

bestowed among its cushions, still protesting that she had wanted to stay and enjoy herself under that duck of a banyan tree, still murmuring that Ju-kwa Hwên the story-teller really was a darling. Her chair was lifted on its carrying-poles cautiously to the bearers' sinewy shoulders, and the small cavalcade started on its hot journey to Ch'ien Mên.

Two of the men were anxious; Lee Wong and the oldest of the attachés.

One was puzzled and a trifle suspicious; John Thorn of Chicago.

He saw that Lee Wong kept persistently close to the English girl and thought he saw that Elizabeth did not resent it.

So near her that he might as well have offered her his silk-clad arm! John wondered why the fellow didn't. Perhaps he would if they had been alone. Lord!

Perhaps some such thought was Feng Me-lah's when she passed them in her litter at the edge of Hay-market Street. She gave them all a radiant, impartial smile and a friendly gesture. But when she had quite passed them her pretty painted mouth curled a little.

That night, summoned to the Palace, when the Dowager chanced to speak of the three English and American ladies, the Manchu girl replying spoke of Elizabeth Kent—or so T'zũ Hsi thought—a shade less approvingly than she had done until then—just a shade.

T'zũ Hsi understood and smiled aside.

The Empress was very kind to Feng Me-lah while she kept her in the pavilion. And when she dismissed her the old Buddha gave the girl a bauble from the Imperial girdle's jeweled pouch and sent a message by her to Lee Wong.

CHAPTER XVI

“WELL! I never expected to live in a temple. Wonder how I’ll like it, when I get over the shock.”

“So do I,” Thorn answered his aunt.

“Don’t the English beat you, Jack? They do me. Here we are, goodness knows where, living in a temple that was old when Christopher Columbus was born—here to cool off a bit after the scorching we had those last few days in Peking. Using it just as we would a cottage we’d rented at Long Branch or in the Adirondacks. Our own furniture, loads of it, got up here somehow—I s’pose Joan knows how; she manages things like a man. She likes to! Cushions, ice-cream three times a day, our own cooks and all the rest of them. I’ve got a rocking-chair in my bedroom, and this one I’m sitting in out here. There’s a piano in the drawing-room, more new novels than you could read in a year scattered about all over the place. And this is just the sort of thing the English do all over the globe. They’ve got cheek; that’s what I call it. It wouldn’t surprise me, not a mite, to hear that their Viceroy man was using the Taj Mahal for his seaside cottage, eating Yorkshire pudding off of old what’s-her-name’s inlaid tomb. My! the English may be slow, but they get there! And they keep English every time. Bet you’ll play tennis on the tip-top of Mount Everest, if you get there, Jo. And I bet you will some day. Then you’ll give a garden party with lots of stone-heavy cakes, lukewarm, muddy tea, claret cup without enough ice, screams of parasols, men in stovepipe hats and pale creased trousers, a gardenia in every blessed coat, you

in purple satin cut all wrong, Elizabeth and all the other girls in fresh white dresses and Regent Street hats. And at half past seven you'll dress for dinner—*hors d'œuvre* out of tins, sherry and mulligatawny soup, boiled cod with caper sauce, saddle of mutton (whatever that may be) and jugged hare that never saw a jug living or dead, one of those awful pies that you call apple-tarts and boiled custard, made out of powder instead of cream. You poor things! Just the five of us (not counting Hill) all alone here with all these Chinese—must be hundreds of them here! Doesn't it make you feel creepy, Jo?"

"Of course not," the Duchess asserted coolly and quite truthfully.

"Well then, it does me. What are you laughing at, Miss Feng?"

Feng Me-lah had not laughed, but she was dimpling merrily. "You do not count me English, do you, Madam? Without me, you are but four English here."

"Well, so we are, I suppose," Mrs. Van Vleck admitted reluctantly. "But you count with us, of course. You didn't think I counted you in with them, did you, or think I meant you when I said 'all these Chinese'?"

"But I am Chinese, Madam." The Manchu girl did laugh this time.

The American woman shook her head. "More like us than like them," she insisted pointing a disrespectful elbow toward a group of scantily clad coolies squatted about a gaming-board that rested on a wide flat stone a few yards away and three yellow-clads with their great rosaries clanking at their hempen girdles who stood watching and advising the intense, excited gamblers.

Feng Me-lah smiled gravely. "Think not that,

gracious lady-one. They are of my race. Their country is mine. We share home and customs and our allegiance to the same throne. We are kindred—of the blood and of kinship greatly much more importance than kinship of the blood even.”

“Rubbish,” the woman retorted. “Caste is more than race, isn’t it, Jo?”

“I am surprised to hear an American say so,” was all that the Duchess would reply.

Elizabeth saw John Thorn flush and frown. Did it vex him to remember that Me-lah was Chinese? As much Chinese, as unalterably Chinese as those unclad, unwashed peasants gaming wolfishly, gleaming in their sweat! One leaned against the tree behind him, as he staked, and scratched his back vigorously (and with evident relief) against the tree’s rough bark.

“Ugh!” Hilda Van Vleck shuddered. The traveled Duchess smiled. Elizabeth Kent looked away.

“He enjoys his scratching-post,” Feng Me-lah said softly, “my countryman.”

And Elizabeth saw Thorn bite his lip—not in amusement.

“There ought to be the always scratching-posts at many convenient places. It is unkindness that coolie-ones or travel-ones should lack them.”

Mrs. Van Vleck changed that subject, if not too adroitly. “Well, here we are; and it’s cooler than Peking was, I must admit. But it does make me feel creepy, sometimes it does, to be up here on the hills alone with such a lot of”—she caught Feng Me-lah’s laughing eye and hesitated for a better word—“queer men watching us all the time.”

“I don’t think they even look at us,” Elizabeth said.

"I believe that we do not interest them in the least."

"Oh! don't we though? They are watching us all the time. I can feel them doing it, even when I can't see them. Awful Chinese coolies and the dislodged priests peeping at us everywhere, like rabbits sticking their heads out of burrows in the rocks!"

"But we have not dislodged the temple-priests," Miss Feng corrected gently. "They have not rented us their cells. Their cells they keep for their own use, Madam. The rooms we use are the temple guest-rooms that earn them revenue the priests are glad to have."

"What are all those coolies here for anyway?" Mrs. Van Vleck demanded. "*They* don't live here, do they?"

"They are here," Feng Me-lah answered, "to do errands for us, to snatch with the eagerness of hunger any work we throw them. And always where the English come there is much work for native hands—and backs." But she said it nicely.

"Well," Hilda Van Vleck insisted, "it's a funny place. And if it's a guest-room, the room I sleep in, what business had a great big Chinese god in it?"

"Perhaps he has been crowded out of the god-rooms," Miss Feng suggested. "There are a great many gods in some of our temples. In others there is only one. And there *are* temples that have no god—since the Opium War. Perhaps he has been a bad god and is being punished. Perhaps the holy Abbot put him in your sleep-room, Madam, to do you the much honor."

"Good Lord!" Hilda Van Vleck grumbled. "But, all the same, I'd like to buy him, for my dining-room at home, perhaps—though I can't say I consider him an appetizing sight—for all he is the food-god."

"Give me your pardon," Miss 'Feng begged. "I have seen him, Madam, when Miss Kent and I put blossoms on your dress-hair table. He is not any one of our food-gods. He is our eat-god, a very important god, the Belly-god."

Mrs. Van Vleck cried out her disgusted dismay. But the others laughed, even Elizabeth, and even, the English girl noticed, John Thorn.

"Well—he's got one," the New York woman admitted with twinkling eyes. "He's fat all right—I'm thin to him. I shall buy him all the same, and change his name when I get him over home. Do you suppose they'll sell him, Miss Feng?"

"Most things can be bought in China now," Feng Me-lah answered sadly. "And the priests are poor."

"They look it. Well, I'll pay them a nice fat price then, for their fat old god." Not for worlds would Hilda Van Vleck have referred by his name to the portly god she coveted, but her eyes danced at the thought of it.

"That's pretty over there," she said approvingly, "that sacred mountain with the trees nodding in the sunlight. And all those silver pines with their black topknots! That waterfall is pretty, too, and I like to hear it. I hope you brought your camera, John. I told you to bring along your camera."

"Blessed if I did!" Thorn owned as remorsefully as he could. He hated photographing, and felt he had been overworked at it since their arrival in China. He hated lugging the heavy thing about, and distinctly objected to the yellow, and often unclad, non-descripts that gathered as by magic whenever he set up his tripod, crowding it and him closer and closer; Chinese old and Chinese young that needed little encouragement to handle his tools and his personal gar-

ments with ardent impartiality and grimy fingers. He photographed badly too; and Aunt Hilda could buy easily enough excellent photographs of every blessed thing in China.

"Well!" in her indignation Mrs. Van Vleck suddenly sat so bolt upright in her rocking-chair that she very nearly shot out of it onto the temple's beautifully mosaicked but very hard flooring. "I told you to bring your camera! Joan has left hers behind, too! Loaned it to Lord Arthur Ridley—goodness knows why."

Thorn steadied the rocker with a quick hand on one of its arms; the Duchess caught and held the other arm with a hand as quick and almost as sinewy as John's.

"But I have brought my camera, Madam," Feng Me-lah interposed soothingly. "It is an excellent camera. Mr. Thorn can use it."

John Thorn shot the Manchu girl a despairing look. Over her round fan she gave him a naughty smile.

"He'd probably break it," Mrs. Van Vleck grumbled sourly. "I *am* mad at you, John. Can *you* take photographs, Miss Feng?"

"Oh—yes," Me-lah asserted simply. "I can photograph everything here for you."

"So you shall then. And John shall tote your camera and things about for you."

Both the girls laughed. And Elizabeth thought that Mr. Thorn looked less annoyed at his aunt's suggestion than she had expected the lazy American to feel.

English Elizabeth thought the Chicago man culpably indolent, for no better reason than that she had never heard him talk about sports.

This was not the first time it had crossed her mind that Thorn did not dislike Me-lah or dislike being with her. And Me-lah had dimpled prettily at the suggestion that her photography should be accompanied by Mr. Thorn. Surely—! That mustn't happen. It was no business of hers, of course. And as far as John Thorn was concerned it did not interest her in the least. Let him fall in love with a Zulu girl if he wished; he was only an American after all, and quite aside from that she did not like him and never should. But she did like Feng Me-lah. No harm must come to Me-lah up here with them in the Western Hills. Me-lah was Aunt Joan's guest and her own. It was she, Elizabeth herself, who had begged Mr. Feng to let Me-lah come here with them when the aunts had announced that they were going to follow a very general fashion of the European residents of Peking: rent a hill temple and live there through the worst of the hot weeks. The Great Heat had not come yet, but it was nearing. And it had suited them best to make their temple sojourn now.

It was to Elizabeth herself that Mr. Feng had loaned Me-lah, in a special sense to her that he had entrusted Me-lah. There must be no hint of love affair, not a fragment, between nice old Mr. Feng's treasured daughter and an objectionable American man. It was up to Elizabeth to see that there was not. All those white-yellow entanglements, even the only-surface ones, were odious and cheapening. Every one she'd seen, and she had seen several in Legation Quarter, had made her English soul bristle. Mrs. Van Vleck was such a goose! If she saw Me-lah dimple just that way again, or smile like that over her fan at John Thorn, she'd speak to Aunt Joan about it. Aunt Joan had good sense, as much as Mrs. Van Vleck

lacked it. It was a pity that Mr. Lee Wong was not here with them. He was a friend of Mr. Feng and probably he'd have looked after Me-lah, and without seeming to do it, if there'd been any need. Lee Wong had a wonderful way of doing things quietly, without seeming to do them. She had been very glad that the two aunts' teacher was not to be of their party up here, but now she was sorry. She'd have to look after Me-lah herself—that was evident—and she would. She began doing it at once, by giving John Thorn a square black look that while it amused him made him wonder what in thunder he had done to offend little Miss Icicle this time!

Thorn was none too pleased to be here, the one man among four women. The two oldish ones were wrapped up in each other, but even so Aunt Hilda could be trusted to be pretty demanding of his time and attention. As for the two girls, one whom he did not like and who apparently liked him less, was stiff and English, the other was Chinese! Not much for him in any of it. Peking had been bad enough. This was even closer quarters—he liked it less. Not a man to talk or smoke with! Thorn was a man's man—as far as that can be stated of any modern American.

He regretted Peking.

And he wondered sadly how all this was going to pan out, even for a few weeks.

CHAPTER XVII

ELIZABETH wondered as anxiously as Thorn did how it was going to work. She liked being away from the hot enwalled city. The great Walls of Peking had seemed to prison her. Country born and bred, the English girl liked being here out in

the open. But fond as she had grown of Feng Me-lah, and realized that she had, she would have been glad to have another English girl or two up here with them, and she very much wished they could have brought a few attachés—of suitable age—with them, to explore and scramble with her, explore and roam the lovely hills and inviting byways. Me-lah would not care to do much of that. Elizabeth had no intention of making a chum of Mr. John Thorn even if she could, which she doubted. One couldn't dawdle about in a musty old Chinese temple all day long; at least she couldn't. She could not leave poor Miss Feng to fend for herself either! If Mrs. Van Vleck really did send Mr. Thorn and Me-lah off all over the place photographing together she would have to tag along with them. How horrid! Why had she been so foolish as to let Aunt Joan bring her to China? The boats would bump and the victors' bonfires be lit in May week at Cambridge soon. The primroses and bluebells were almost over now at home, gone in their gold and azure millions; but she knew a cool coppice where stray ones of them both always came late. She often had found them smiling shyly up at her in mid-May. She had found them once or twice even in early June. And there were violets still in the woods at home. All the birds were singing their May songs—love-songs—in the Surrey woods. And the woods! All their lovely leafage unfurling green and tender. The birch trees were at their best. The English miracle of wayside ferns had come. There were flecks of sun on the moss. The moon looked warmer than it had since September. Hedge roses were on their way. The rose-buds hinted of the fragrance and color they hid till June. The cuckoo was calling. Squirrels dashed across the lanes. The kitchen-gardens were busied.

The cottage chimneys were smokeless. Cats basked contentedly on the old churchyard wall. The lilacs bloomed against her father's study wall. The beech trees— Tears were not far behind the English girl's brooding hazel-gray eyes.

Feng Me-lah was perfectly contented. Her father had wished her to accept Miss Kent's invitation—so had the Old Imperial One. And it was very beautiful here. Beauty makes Chinese happiness and secures it always. Feng Me-lah was neither discontented, anxious nor homesick. She liked all these four foreign friends of hers. She loved the temple and the hills about it.

Mrs. Van Vleck and the Duchess were sufficient to themselves. They knew that they could not be together much longer, and they were happy in the uninterrupted intimacy that this isolated old temple residence gave them. And they did not question that "the children" would amuse themselves well enough. If they did not, they ought to.

The thoughtless selfishness of youth? Age has the grosser selfishness and the colder; more deliberate and inexcusable.

But the three who were younger were content enough to amuse themselves as best they could, and leave the two reunited friends alone for most of the day; alone to drain their "cup of kindness yet." Perhaps John felt, and certainly the two girls did, a sympathy and tenderness that were something prophetic to the two older women who had given back their girlhood to each other. They laughed like girls now and then when they were alone, or believed they were. The Duchess put her thin arm about Hilda Van Vleck's ample shoulders as they sauntered together beside the priests' fish-stream. They whispered slyly

to each other now and then. You often came upon them sitting hand in hand. You would grow old yourself in the far, far future. It would be nice then perhaps to come across an old friend you had shared love with when life was young and vivid. It would be good to grow young again together if only for a day. If the aunts held aloof rather selfishly up here in the hill-side solitude, John and Elizabeth and Feng Me-lah were generously considerate, and left them all alone day after day.

They all liked it here, except John Thorn and the English maid. Hill was as adamantly insular as Mr. Thorn believed she was—but “insular” was not the word he would have used.

Many of the larger temples and monasteries in China are guest-houses, always remunerative, often very comfortable, vastly better to stay in than the indescribably horrid Chinese inns. This was very comfortable. Even Thorn found it that—if only it had not been so preponderantly a hen-party.

Except picturesquely in the distance they saw little of the temple-priests. The Chinese servants they had brought with them from Peking were trustworthy, highly capable, long-experienced in European service. Both the Duchess and Mrs. Van Vleck would have felt perfectly safe here with them even without John Thorn.

A Chinese temple of the better class is of many buildings. Thorn had counted twenty here; several of them were large.

Perched on the broad hill-slope and zigzagging up and down it, full of courtyards, flanked by its gardens, no building, no group of buildings, could have been more beautifully situated. It basked in sunshine, but the great trees that murmured about it and the sweet,

chill of the mountain air cooled it. It was clean—the rooms *they* used were—and it was a low panorama of endless carvings and lion-guarded tiles, triple-roofed, bell-hung. The temple gongs had pleasant droning voices, the temple bells were sweet. Hilda Van Vleck called it “cute,” the Duchess pronounced it interesting and a change. John Thorn thought it ridiculous and studied its vivid sprawling architecture with critical amusement. The English girl liked it, suspected and sometimes felt its throbbing significance which she could not understand. Twice she took an armful of wild flowers she had gathered into the pagoda and put them in the empty bowls and vases on the long votive table. The old Abbot came in upon her unexpectedly, the second time she did it. He was vastly pleased, and blessed her and gave her a warm and damaged sweetmeat from an intimate inner crevice of his yellow sleeve. She did not mind the sticky sweetmeat in the least, and no more did Webster and John Brown a little later. But the elaborated benediction embarrassed her greatly. She never went into the embossed porcelain pagoda again. But several mornings after matins the old Abbot brought her a camelia or a marigold. And Miss Kent both in friendliness and to pass the time set her to embroider a “proper altar cloth” for the pagoda table. She made slow headway with it, and she did not do it very well. Elizabeth was not fond of her needle. She did not finish the rather topsyturvy offering to the pagoda table until long after she had gone from China. But when she did finish it she contrived to send it to the friendly Abbot through Feng Me-lah. And again he was greatly pleased, if a little shocked at the foreign-devil embroidery, and used it to veil thickly a jar of candied ginger which he kept surreptitiously well-hidden in his

own cell. Only the youngest novice knew about it, and he never told. Occasionally the Superior gave him a knob of excellent ginger. And if Elizabeth had known the final bestowal of her labored stitchery, she would not have cared.

If there was little to do here, there was plenty to see. The English girl walked and scrambled tirelessly, John Thorn was active by nature if not by habit; Feng Me-lah had abundant physical pluck, and to her fatigue was bagatelle-price to pay for sight of beauty. Turn where you would, there was beauty here panoramaed across the purple hills, cupped in ten thousand crannies and folds.

Three can be a comfortable number. If the girls might have enjoyed each other's *tête-à-tête* comradeship a trifle more than they did the international trio that Thorn made it, they did not say so even to each other. It was not Mr. Thorn's fault that he rather had to be their escort everywhere. Feng Me-lah would have been consciously timid, prowling the hillsides with no more virile protection than that of another girl. Elizabeth came of fearless generations. A foremother of hers had heard the approaching bagpipes call that the Campbells were coming—at Lucknow. All her forefathers had been service men. Her brothers, most of her younger kinsmen, were fighting in South Africa now. The Abbot had given his word that his guests would not be molested within three *li* of the temple precincts. Elizabeth Kent would have felt no fear at going alone everywhere that they three went together; but after all a man was a man, and this man's manners were improving. He himself improved on long acquaintance, she had to own. And it was no unfriendliness to John Thorn, but a hunger to write to her favorite brother, that made her refuse the usual

afternoon ramble that Thursday. Me-lah and Mr. Thorn would not go far without her, of course—if they left the temple at all.

The mountain air was a tonic, the May day was winelike, sweet, bracing and insidious. Thorn's boots were stout and entirely comfortable. Feng Me-lah was nimble on her stilt-like Manchu shoes. Man and woman and young, they had little care how far they went, took less heed where. The temple was stuffy until the sun fell. You could turn back whenever you liked. There was no reason to pick or choose a direction; whichever trail they took would lead them from a very beautiful view to a lovelier.

They sauntered on leisurely, chatting together gaily, not troubling to speak. John whistled contentedly when he liked, and once Feng Me-lah sang soft snatches of something that Thorn thought was quite pretty.

They made their first distinct halt when the girl cried out, in her own tongue, at sight of a splendid but delicate tree growing quite alone on the hillside, its wide branches thrust out eagerly as if thirsty to drink through its green leaf-cups the clear mountain air that sparkled softly up here on the Western Hills.

Feng Me-lah gave the dryandra a courtly salutation. Thorn saw that she did it with perfect seriousness, and he smiled. His smile was not critical. He liked Miss Feng more and more—very much better than he did Elizabeth Kent. And he was growing used to Feng Me-lah's funny Chinese ways, and tolerant of them all.

The Manchu girl spoke to the tree, still quite seriously. She addressed it affectionately but with ceremony by its name.

"The solitary dryandra," she translated to her com-

panion. "Always it grows so, high up and alone that it may take into itself all the sweet of the high hill air it grows in; sweet air of the Western Hills that is music distilled so fine that we cannot hear it. But the dryandra hears and loves to fill itself to full fulness with the sweetness-music—full as it could not do if other tree-ones grew close to take from it the milk of its mother, the perfume air of the mountain. Not for bridge-plank or hut or chair do we cut a dryandra ever. Alone for the wood-frame of an honorable lute may we take the wood of a dryandra. We keep the fiber part of these the tree solitaires for the make of our music lutes; and to them it gives the utmost sweetness and harmony. Costliest lutes of ivory or of jade with strings of gold or silver have not quite the sweet voice of the lute-ones that are made of the sweet-souled wood of the solitary dryandra."

"I'm blessed," the American murmured.

"Much we are blessed," Feng Me-lah agreed gravely, "that so beautiful our honorable world is."

"It's a fine tree," John Thorn said hastily. He *did* like Miss Feng extremely, and he had grown very used to her absurd little ways; but he always felt uncomfortably awkward when Chinese hyperbole was uncorked for his consumption.

"It has significance," Miss Feng still agreed. "How the light loves it! They are happy together. How tall-low is it, you think?"

Thorn measured the tree with speculative eyes, then told the girl his estimate. Nor did he smile this time. "Tall-low" had tickled him very much the first time he had heard it, as had "thick-thin" and "cold-hot." But his ears had grown accustomed to that particular nicety of Chinese speech, and it no longer amused him.

Always to translate them so would over-punish Eng-

lish pages; but it is so that the Chinese express themselves. They never use terms of determinative exactness in speaking of what is comparative, but ask of a child, "How bad-good is he?" ask of a fruit, "How sour-sweet is it?" of a merchant, "How rich-poor is he?" of a color, "How pale-dark is it?" Absurd, are they not, the Chinese? And yet—think it out.

Feng Me-lah left the lute-tree reluctantly, and she gave it formal good-by.

"I will ask my dryandra-wood lute sing to you when next you come make-call to my home," she promised as they climbed on. They little suspected how long it would be before she kept that promise, or why.

Up and on they went, the winding way they took rising so gently now that neither realized how high they had climbed.

From their temple-terrace the hills in the distance had looked softly feathered with the green leafage of the trees growing on them. Now, walking among them, the trees showed black-trunked columns, darkly foliaged. The saplings were few and stunted.

This hillside was dense with growth and it was very silent. The crush of their feet on the needles that lay thick beneath the trees was the only sound they heard. Wild flowers grew so thickly in a pagoda's man-made clearing that they looked an Oriental carpet of pulsing color, a carpet into which had crowded all the flower-life that the dense trees had robbed of the wide hillside; a sea of flowers and perfume, lapping happily about the dolphined base of the high fish-pagoda. It was seven-storied, an octagonal tower of stone and bronze fish: great finned monsters, dolphins grotesquely beautiful, tiny crayfish hanging in their monster jaws, tiny lobsters dangling from their great up-reared tails. Even the lions and phœnixes that

guarded the eight corners of all the seven roofs looked fish-like. The lions had long tangled beards—wonderful carving!—but their tails were fins. The phoenixes' feet were fins; their feathers were scales. Many of the wind-bells that hung from the carved ridges were fish-heads; all of them were scaled. Soft blurs of color among the gray of the old carved stone and the ruddy-cinnamon of the twisted bronze, were wild flowers seeded by wind and birds in the earth that storms had tossed almost to the old pagoda's far apex: tiny delicate blooms of violet and purple, amber and gold, a dozen reds, even a spray of the ubiquitous wild white rose.

"Some pagoda," John Thorn called it; but Feng Melah could tell him nothing of its story. She never had heard of it—they must have wandered farther than she'd thought. Some pious man had built it there, of course, and centuries ago; for the fish were Ming fish—that much she knew. Almost always a pagoda had been built by some one pious man who erected it to make a beautiful view more beautiful and to give happiness to any stray traveler who chanced to come upon it. Perhaps they were the first that had seen this one for many years.

They tried the door.

"The view from up top there ought to be worth seeing," Thorn suggested.

But time had jammed the old pagoda door. Push as he liked, the man's strength was nothing against its solid fastness. John Thorn pushed hard and intelligently, and he was very strong. Furnace-heated offices had not sapped the strength his frontiersmen fathers had amassed for him in the old blockhouse days, on the strenuous prairies, on the Mississippi's banks, in the Rockies.

But they had not gone much farther when a treeless crag they climbed gave them a panoramaed view that no pagoda outlook in all China could have surpassed.

They were in a world of purple hills up above a glowing world under a blue-crystal sky so clear that the quivering midday sun seemed to blaze so near that they might have touched it. They counted half a score of pagodas pricking through the cedar trees and pines. Everywhere the silver pines! A brook laughed in the near distance; a great cataract tumbled, foaming and menacing, nearer. Great monasteries looked flat and tiny, they were so far away. A cool lake showed its dimpled silver through a ring of ash trees. Giant creepers flung scarlet trumpets over the bamboos. Lower down placid fields of cotton and shogrum smiled their tender deepening green. A dozen villages were pin-pricks on the landscape; tiny dots of human homes where toil and birth, marriage-rites, crime, thrift, fellowship and rancor were herding Chinese peasants toward their graves. Miles away the roofs of Peking were a tender blur of softened glamor. The Wall's towers looked slender pencils. Only the Temple of Heaven held its color—the bluest blue in all blue-clad China. A thousand marble terraces and balustrades—in the Forbidden City, in the Summer Palace, in tenscore Manchu homes—looked long flakes of mother-of-pearl. The great Lama Temple looked like some tawny lazy snake coiled in sleep. The hideous things of Europe—hotels, legations, the railway station—did not show at all. The Fox Tower was a filmy clot of gray. The parks and gardens were green-gauze veiled emeralds. A glow of soft rose, like a wide scarf of transparent silk, hung a shimmering cloud low down above shimmering Peking. The Ming Tombs were over there. The Great Wall of

China, the yellow ocean of Gobi's dust, the edge of the world were not far.

"But I can't see the temple," Feng Me-lah exclaimed.

"It must be down there behind those sycamores, I guess," Thorn replied contentedly.

Feng Me-lah did not say whether that, too, was her guess of where the temple lay. But she studied the position of Peking gravely and measured its distance with quiet thoughtful eyes.

When she spoke again her companion did not hear her.

Feng Me-lah smiled softly. He had given her pleasure in being so absorbed in the beauty of this her China that he had not heard her speak to him. And for it she gave this man a warmer liking. And she had liked Mr. Thorn from the first.

When she had told them so, Feng Yu had said that he was glad she did, T'zŭ Hsi had murmured her silvery laugh, Lee Wong had made no comment, had not even smiled.

Mr. Thorn turned to her again at last.

"We should make our turn-back now, I think," she told him. "We have come far. Ee-lis-bet cannot have more letter to write now."

"Then she can read or think." Thorn looked at his watch. "Yes, it is later than I thought. But what's the hurry? Unless you are tired or getting hungry. Are you?"

"No one bit."

"Let's go on just a little then. I'd like to spy what's behind those red rocks with all those mountain ash growing right on them. It looks as if it might be some prehistoric magician's garden wall."

"Come then," the girl laughed, "we go make see."

As they turned around the mass of red rock where

the redder berried rowans grew feathering it, they came suddenly upon a scene of mountain holocaust, nature made desolation by ruthless human industry. Beauty blasted by man. Nature's wealth dissipated by poverty's prodigality—squandered, made forever sterile.

"What a darned shame!" Thorn muttered hotly.

"Even Chinese peasant-ones must live, if they can," the Chinese girl told him sadly. She put up her grim defense of her own people's vandalism stoutly; but she sighed when she had, and her gladness in the gladness of the brilliant, kindly day had dimmed on her darkened face. She knew that her father and other wise men felt that the terrible deforestation of China had grown to be a crime and was a national menace. She knew that it sorrowed and troubled T'zŭ Hsi and that the Holy Mother sought and schemed to stop it.

But the necessity must be stopped first. How? It was true indeed that the peasants of China must live—if they could.

Half a hillside was black and charred, hideous as the rubbish-yard of a Pittsburgh works, the charnel of a thousand trees. Above that, trees were burning where they grew, crashing down into the men-fed flames that licked their crackling trunks.

Greedy-eyed peasants watched them, burning as they worked, filling the baskets on each other's backs, gathering the charcoal before it was cold.

They had come upon a little sweating army of charcoal gatherers.

Huts of mud, of dung and of wattle, tents of skin showed that the gatherers and those whose task it was to burn and to watch that the flames did not spread too far were camped here in penury's rough residence; not here for an hour or for a day.

The heat of the fire tortured the heat of noon. The workers were scarcely clad.

They all were working furiously, men and women, children, very old men and women, tiny toddlers still staggering on their baby feet. Mothers (many of them all but children still) suckled the babies slung in rags of hemp at their breasts. There is no playtime for Chinese poverty except at the Feast of Lanterns' blessed pause.

"What a darned shame," Thorn said again.

"So we know it," Feng Me-lah answered more gently now. "Darned" was a new word to her; but she was ashamed that the alien saw her people scorching all its breathing, growing loveliness from one of the Western Hills—the almost sacrosanct hills of North China—hills among them that were sacred indeed and granters of miracle, holied for thousands of years.

Feng Me-lah turned away abruptly, and John Thorn followed her without a word. A sick smoke-taste of China's thousand-fold tragedy was on his lip, a far, faint realization of one atom of it in his Western mind.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FEW rods on—they were climbing down now—they stumbled upon one of the wonders of China; one that has baffled science always, and perhaps always will.

Feng Me-lah recognized it at once. She had seen it before, one summer with her father.

"I show you some strange thing," she gurgled gaily. "And now it is I know me where we are." It was her first hint that she had any doubt of where they had

come or of how they were to return—unless her gathered scrutiny of where Peking lay had hinted it. “Come, with me come!”

And Thorn picked his way beside her over a stretch of thorn-plants that carpeted with their rank sharp growth the crumbling débris of an old ruined, quite forsaken temple, to an opening in the hill, a small, deep cave, but it was low, open at all its width—followed her into the long low cave. It was taller than he; he had no need to stoop. It was an insignificant thing in caves, not in the least pictorial. Thorn knew half a dozen better caves at home.

This unimpressive cave had not even much darkness to give it a touch of mystery. Its outer opening was too wide for its shallow depth to dim the daylight much.

It was very warm in there, though several degrees colder than the torrid, sun-soaked treeless thorn-patches outside in the roofless crumbling temple’s sorry skeleton.

At the cave’s far end a deep hole cut into the earth. Thorn barely reached it when he staggered back. A furious blast of ice-cold air that rushed up from the hole in the ground had buffeted him back, nearly had thrown him down.

“What the devil is it?” he gasped.

“No person know,” Me-lah told him. “This is the Two Temperatures Cave. No more can I tell you; not more any can.”

“Two Temperatures! That’s no lie.” Nor was it. The comparative coolness of the cave and the stinging fury-cold that belched up from its almost round natural hole were divided by a hair line. The two temperatures were there all right, their boundary

line as sharply marked as if a mathematician's accurate, ruler-guided pencil had drawn it.

Thorn went back to the ice-air shaft. He went more cautiously this time, but again the blast of Arctic cold slewed him shivering from it.

"One temperature too many!" the American said between chattering teeth, trying to say it with a laugh, but only succeeding with a shudder. "Let's get out of this."

Feng Me-lah giggled wickedly. "It make big joke of you!" and as they reached the outer air peals of her girlish laughter tinkled gaily through the tumbled temple ruins. She had quite forgotten the perilous impoverishing deforestation of China. For she came of the race that can know no sore that mirth will not salve, even will heal, at least for a time. The bubbling well of their laughter always is near, and it purges their hates and discords as nothing else will.

John Thorn looked at her with actual amazement. The thing that so amused her was so slight that to him her gamin mirth was preposterous. But her laughing was pretty. Even her giggling was pretty. He never had met any other girl who had a pretty giggle.

They had turned back now, but they were not hurrying. The day was still young. Thorn was not hungry; Feng Me-lah insisted that she was not. And there was meat and drink in these high hills' crystalline air.

They had had a small amicable dispute as to which of two turnings they'd take down the hillside. But Feng Me-lah had yielded to him with a friendly shrug and a courteous gesture. All roads led to Rome, he assured her. And it didn't really matter; both the paths led down towards their temple, and they'd get

there about as soon by one as by the other of the paths that were not paths at all, but would serve for footways only because they twisted down narrowly a little less tree-and-rock-barred than the rest of the hillside about them.

They picked their way slowly, pausing fairly frequently to chat and to gaze at whatever attracted either.

They came upon a tiny temple almost smothered by gourds and trumpetflowers that grew and twisted about it. There are thousands of temples in North Chihli.

"Shall we see what's inside it?" Thorn asked, not because he in the least cared to explore it, but because he knew that Feng Me-lah was greedy to see all that was here where she might not come again. She had not left her father until this time, she had told him, and he had heard one of the diplomats of Legation Street say that Feng Yu was kept close to Old Buddha's heels always now.

A wind-screen of twisted brass stood so close to the temple's entrance that it was rather a squeeze—at least it was for Thorn—to make their way behind it, and so into the dusky prayer-room.

It was unlit and neglected. Dust carpeted it thickly; the outer day scarcely lamped the small room's heavy dimness. No tapers stood in the incense-burners at the altar's side. The god was broken and paintless. Discolored hangings and tassels were rotting; shreds and threads of them strewed the floor's thick dust. Bats flapped lazily against the cornice's faded paint of once rich blue-and-red scroll work. The wine-cups on the votive table were empty and chipped. The artificial flowers were thin, perished rags and a dirty gray. The little high-perched temple was desolate and chill.

It had a graveyard taste, John Thorn thought, and a graveyard smell.

But a monk knelt motionless at the unplenished, ungarnished altar.

If he heard them, he made no sign; so motionless in prayer that the man staring at him could not see the heave of his breathing—but the place was darkly dim.

The shabby robe of faded yellow was deep with dust, dust as thick as the floor's.

The motionless yellow-clad was praying devoutly, supplicating his god with outstretched, upturned palms. A fool, but pathetic, the American thought him, a living man who might have been doing something useful or something pleasant, wasting his life and his strength, squatted in filth miles from anywhere, worshipping the ugliest, shabbiest monkey of a Chinese god that John Thorn had seen yet. And he had seen a truly terrible number of them.

Something tangible but irresistible caught at his nerves, gave them a nasty jerk. He went nearer, looked closer. The monk was dead—and he'd been dead a long time. It was a mummy kneeling there petrified in prayer; a skeleton clothed in faded rags and brittle brown parchment skin that had cracked wide on the dead bone of his hairless skull, eyeless sockets staring ghoulishly at the grinning god. John Thorn thought him the deadest dead man he had ever seen.

Thorn's gorge rose.

But Feng Me-lah bent lower in salutation than she had to the lute-tree, and knelt down reverently and prayed beside the ghoulish yellow-robe who had breathed his living prayers here three hundred years ago, before a garnished, plenished altar to a freshly painted and gilded god.

And when she rose at last she took her tiny coin purse from her wallet and thrust it gently in the mummied hand. Thorn heard the flat Chinese gold pieces clink softly as she did it. And he heard the dead man's rosary rattle weirdly like the ghost it was, as the girl's jeweled fingers touched it lingeringly.

John Thorn backed to the door as abruptly as masculine vanity would let him. He was more than glad to leave the yellow-clad to pray alone to-day as he had been praying there for uncountable years. When he looked at her in the sunlit path again Thorn saw that the girl's wrapt face was both exalted and glad.

"You are a queer girl," he murmured.

"I am of my country, Mr. Thorn," she quietly reminded him. "We have seen a most holy. There are other monk-ones praying so after many years, in other temples of our country. But they are few. It is happiness to have seen him, and it will give me luck that I have touched his rosary. He is much holy. He has said his prayer to his honorable god, kneeling there as he did when Wan Li ruled in China."

"Why did you leave your purse?" the man demanded. "He cannot do anything with your money."

"Kwan who hears our cries will banker it for him," Feng Me-lah answered gravely.

"You are a queer girl," John said again.

"You think?" she asked with a smile.

John Thorn smiled back at her.

What a pretty girl! Devilishly pretty! But one thing was sure; he'd go into no more Chinese temples this day—not until they got back to the big up-to-date one where there were easy chairs, books from Kelly & Walsh and from a library in London called Mudie's, and where there'd be birds done to a turn for dinner, and mango-ice and finger-bowls.

Miss Feng chatted gaily as they went, stole a spray of rosy wild azalea for her robe, gave Thorn a smaller bit for his coat, offering it with a pretty maidenly gesture, with a prettier air of grave hospitality to the Western stranger within her own perfumed Eastern gates.

Presently she trilled a happy stave as she went carefully lest she bruise a fern.

But the jaunt had lost its savor for John Thorn. A dislike of China that he had all but forgotten took possession of him. He did *not* like the Flowery Kingdom at quite such short range as that had been. And when he touched Miss Feng's sleeve to steady her as her preposterous heels teetered her a little on a rounded rock he was careful not to touch the tiny jeweled hand that had laid a purse almost caressingly in the dead man's shriveled hand.

They'd cut back steadily for home now, he privately resolved. It was time they went, anyway. The girl must be tired. He was not hungry. Lord, no; not now! But it was time that they went back. And he'd like a bath.

In the meantime, he'd smoke. That would be no infringement of Chinese etiquette. And while he struck his match, he looked about him cautiously for the shortcut that would be swift and sure but not obvious. The Chinese had no sense of time, he knew; but, no matter what the time was, he liked this girl much too well to let her understand that he wished to make for home and other companionship before she did. For he'd not moon about on this hill of crack-brain adventures another minute longer. Miss Kent must have finished her letters long ago. She'd had time to write a dozen. And he had promised Aunt Hilda not to cold-shoulder or neglect the little English girl.

Wilily he led their way, astutely made a skilful detour, not at all obviously.

It was half an hour before he suspected that they were lost.

The sun began to sink towards the purple hills' highest rims before he owned to himself that he was anxious—even frightened.

CHAPTER XIX

IT grew cold on the Western Hills towards midnight. The old familiar stars looked a long way off. There was no moon.

The willow trees shivered in the dark. Wild night-creatures cried; some of them crawled. Several of them had hard phosphorescent eyes, fiendish eyes. And that plucky Chinese girl never turned a hair. She took it with simple girlish dignity that the troubled man thought the finest thing he'd ever seen. And she was cheerful all the time.

Feng Me-lah suggested that they might with lots of luck—for neither of them blinked the sorry fact that they were completely lost—find their way back to the little hill-perched temple they had explored. It would be warmer in its shelter.

Perhaps it would, Mr. Thorn admitted, but he doubted their finding it in the dark, and he could not risk her coming to harm as they went. The place was rough with stones, tree-limbs intersected such paths as they had found while it was light. Stones and low-growing trees would be serious peril in this black of night. He could take care that nothing hit her that hit him first, but he could not protect her on both sides

at once. Either of them might take a misstep that would cripple their going back when it grew light again. Even if they knew, which neither of them did, in what direction to go it would be madness to go on now. Twigs and broken branches as well as stones and splinters of rock strewn the hillside. How were you to step over instead of on what you could not see? And to step over instead of on such small obstacles was the first rule of woodcraft. A very small twig lying on their path might throw them any minute. They were lucky that none had already. There was nothing for it but to stay where they were until daybreak. He would get her home then, no fear, he promised more confidently than he felt. And now he'd make her as comfortable as he could. And he set about doing it with the brisk energy characteristic of his race.

Miss Feng was not to stir an inch until he said the word. He would not go far. He'd test every step before he took it. If she called he would be back to her at once.

Fumbling cautiously in the unriven dark, Thorn found at last a sheltered slope, fairly soft with moss and ferns, partly walled by sturdy tree-trunks. A menacing night-wind was rising fast; it would not whip in there much.

"I am going to carry you," he told Feng Me-lah when he had clambered back to her, not too easily. "Don't be afraid. I'll take care of you all right. It isn't far."

"I can go myself where you do," the Manchu girl protested.

"Perhaps. But I am better shod than you are for negotiating what we are going to," the American told her as he picked her up and slanted the burden of the

girl to the angle that made her weight least hampering. "You catch hold tight. I'll not drop you. Good girl! That's it!"

It was not far he took her, but it was slow going in the bat-black dark.

John Thorn went very carefully. Neither spoke a word until he put her down on a thick bed of ferns close against a wide oak's moss-grown trunk.

"That's all hunky-dory, so far. Wait a bit though till I've made you a fire. That will be fine."

"You must not! I think you could not do it, but you are not to try do it, Mr. Thorn."

"Why not?"

"We may be near where the charcoal-burners have been. If we are, we might have all the hillside blazing all about us. Even if the burners have not been here, all the woods are dry. We dare not make a fire, if we could. You not have seen a Chinese hill afire, but me I have seen it."

"I have seen a prairie fire though. And I guess you are about right. I'd give a lot if you had a thicker dress on."

"I wish you had," Feng Me-lah answered.

Thorn longed to ask her how hungry she was—he jolly well knew how hungry he was. But he wasn't going to talk about that any, since there was exactly nothing he could do about it. Why hadn't he pushed chocolates or something in his pocket! A girl ought to have chocolates on a picnic of this sort. He'd get her some sort of breakfast in the morning somehow—catch a crab, a bird or a goat, find some open place to make a fire, bake it as you did clams. There might be berries about. He wasn't exactly up in Chinese wild berries, but a Chinese girl might know which would kill them and which would not. Lord, he'd like

a drink. Bet she would! They'd both have to wait. But they'd hunt up some sort of brook as soon as it was light.

And suddenly it was light, light as day, just for a moment.

A great sheet of lightning, broad as the heavens above them, burned and crinkled above the Western Hills; magnificent, appalling.

"Good Lord! it's going to rain pitchforks in a minute! A thunderstorm will be the limit. How am I to keep you from getting drenched? I wish to goodness you had a thicker dress on."

"No rain," Feng Me-lah told him. "All the rain wet is moons after this time to come yet. This is the heat fire of the night-sky. It will not strike down to us. It is very beautiful! See it do now. Much I wish that my eminent father-one had seen that we saw. Its beauty would much have rejoiced the heart of my honorable parent."

Good Lord! What manner of girl was this! Babbling about the beauty of heat lightning here alone with a man of stranger race high on the wild hills, deep in the night, miles and miles from anywhere, miles and miles from everybody. Didn't she care? Hadn't she a mite of fear? Wished her father was along here with them, did she! Well, so did he. Three would be better company than two in the circumstances. What would Feng Yu say to all this, when Feng learned it? Golly! He had not thought of that before. He didn't believe this Manchu girl had thought of it at all even now. Feng Yu would think of it—good and hard. There'd be the devil to pay very likely. Chinese devils at that! And Feng Me-lah had not wished that old Feng Yu were here with them for the social convenience of a father's presence, let

alone propriety—on Thorn's soul he was sure the girl had not—but that Feng Yu might lave his soul in the panorama picture of sheet-lightning sweeping with eerie majesty over the black cypress trees of the Western Hills! It beat him!

As the great spread of flame flashed out, as splendid in going as its sudden coming had been, Thorn's troubled eyes caught that Me-lah was bending down busied at something. He saw the gems of her many rings flash as her fingers worked quickly.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"Taking my shoes off, Mr. Thorn John. They are the best for our make walk, but discomfortable for the sit down, unless there is footstool."

"No you don't," Thorn found her hand and caught it before he spoke. "You let me do that."

"You must not!" Miss Feng cried in unmistakable alarm. "Touch not! Touch not. You will tangle my shoes' fastening, break it, perhaps. Leave you alone my Manchu shoes with your not-know fingers of Europe. My fingers know, let them they do it."

It seemed a sensible suggestion. John Thorn let free the softest hand he ever had felt with his. The softest hand he ever had touched, he knew!

"But, look here, won't your feet be cold; and won't you catch cold?"

"No," Miss Feng laughed. "My stockings I wear are excellent warmness."

"I hope you don't take cold," the American persisted.

"Have you the content that I make me my Manchu comfort in my Manchu way," Feng Me-lah told him a touch severely. "How are your feet?" she added with kindly concern.

"All right," John asserted not altogether without

embarrassment. He was not accustomed to have girls enquire about the welfare of his feet.

"I think you be wise if you take off your shoes," Miss Feng advised earnestly. "We made far walk to here. I think we must make far walk back to the temple tomorrow—if we find it," she added cheerfully. "Take you off of your feet that are tired your terrible English shoe."

"No, thanks," John Thorn replied almost stiffly. He saw himself sitting up here in his stocking-feet, alone in China with a Chinese girl long after midnight. Feng Me-lah's suggestion shocked him.

Then he laughed. What an ass he was. This was not Illinois. And Feng Me-lah was as right as right could be. She was dainty and sweet, every bit of her. And she was a jolly good fellow, too. This blasted scrape was neither his fault nor hers. And she was taking it like a perfect little lady. Which was just what she was, bless her! Chinese or no Chinese. He didn't know a girl who would have behaved better, up here like this; he knew several who would not, he thought, have behaved half so well. And come to think of it, wasn't it more his fault than hers? Of course it was. He'd had no business to take a girl for a walk and not have more sense than to get lost—not even in China, not even a Chinese girl. Least of all, a Chinese girl! Feng Me-lah had not said, "Shan't we go for a walk?" She was not that sort. He had suggested it. And he had led the way. And a nice brand of idiot he'd shown up at it! And here they were perched up on the top of China's top hill at past midnight. It was growing cold. Aunt Hilda would be having fits by now, if he knew Aunt Hilda. He wondered how many search-parties were out looking for them by this. All he could say was, he very

much wished a party or two would find them! And Mr. Feng would have worse fits when he heard about it. There would be ructions with Mr. Feng Yu, if he was any sort of a judge of that Chinese parent and mandarin. Yes; it was his fault. And the girl never had given a hint that she thought so. When he got home, home to Illinois, he'd have something to say to the first fellow citizen he heard say "heathen Chineese." And that something would be pointed.

Thorn got out his cigarette-case and his match-box. Never a heavy smoker, he had only smoked once all day long; so fortunately both box and case were almost full. Supper was out of the question; he must not dare to go to sleep; but tobacco would be very much better than nothing—the next best thing to fried chicken and a mattress and pillow.

When Miss Feng had accepted a cigarette, Thorn took one himself and struck a match carefully. They made the one match do for them both.

"You all hunky-dory?" Thorn asked Feng Me-lah.

"Perfectly hunkee douree," she answered politely, without the slightest idea of what the new English words meant.

"I think you are a brick," her companion told her.

They smoked together in silence for several minutes, before Feng Me-lah laughed gently.

"What's the joke?"

But Miss Feng would not tell him. Why should she? For Feng Me-lah had laughed in strict confidence to the night and to the Western Hills. She had not been thinking of Mr. Thorn when she had laughed. She had been thinking of Lee Wong, and suddenly had wondered what he'd feel when he knew that Feng Yu's daughter had had to sit all night without evening-rice,

night-cup, sleep-mat or slave-girl, unfed, untended on the crest of a pitch-black Western Hill.

Partly to keep awake, a little perhaps to keep this unexpected companionship of theirs the freer from awkwardness, John Thorn began to chat at random.

Feng Me-lah seemed in a graver mood; but he felt it a happier mood than his. She turned their talk to things that mattered; a little to international questions, more to things of nature and to trends of mind, causes of human conduct. The girl's calmness amazed him. He could not fail to realize that it was perfectly unaffected. He did not understand that it was a long-tuned instrument answering to the fingers of night, the music of the dark, hushed hills: a Chinese soul at peace in humble communion with Nature.

It was in no way defensive of him, or of her probably unprecedented plight. John Thorn saw that plainly. Feng Me-lah was not afraid of him, and she was not embarrassed—no more ill-at-ease than Queen Victoria was sitting perched up on her throne in Windsor Castle. It surprised him a lot; for the Queen of England had been sitting on that throne of hers at Windsor a considerable number of years, and this little Chinese girl wasn't anywhere near twenty. Thorn believed that England's only throne-chair lived at Windsor, and he had an exaggerated idea of its height. He had no idea of the long centuries of regnant culture that had put Feng women—had put Feng Me-lah—at unassailable ease long, long before the Saxon or the Teuton had come to Britain. Few Westerns ever have. China's stupendous past (its sanity, health, reasonableness, its spirit and its spirituality, its immense significance) is perhaps the greatest pre-natal influence the world ever has experienced, or has

to-day. It is incalculable. It had made Feng Me-lah. In no fantastic sense, it was she. If the Manchus have been absorbed, also they have absorbed.

But at last Feng Me-lah hid a tiny yawn behind a tiny palm—a nicety of manners quite needless; it still was pitch dark. Thorn could not have seen the widest of uncovered yawns.

“Will you make you a sleep-nap now, Mr. Thorn?” she asked brightly—her voice very wide awake indeed. “It must be in the Hour-of-the-Ox now, I think. Let us share watch as they call it on your big fire boats. Sleep you now. When I see it late the Hour-of-the-Tiger I will make you the wake and sleep me until the Hour-of-the-Hare lets us see to find back our way. In the Hour-of-the-Hare the hint of the day-star’s return to us will show gray through the black of the night. Then I will tell you wake you. As the Hour-of-the-Hare grows the return of the day-star will flame up over the mountains and show us our way.”

“Me go to sleep while you sit and watch! Not on your tintype. It’s me for the night-watch. You go to sleep, you poor little thing. You must be mighty tired. I ought to have thought of it before.”

Feng Me-lah laughed that away. She did not say that whether she was tired or not she was terribly sleepy.

“I wish I had brought us my lute,” she exclaimed instead. “I could make you the music then to shorten the time of the dark. Shall I sing you with no lute to the aid?” She knew that she had to do something to keep herself awake. And she felt it would be kinder not to leave her friend to watch for them both while she slept at her own lazy ease. She was feeling colder and colder. Probably Mr. Thorn was.

She would try to amuse him—he'd notice less how cold it grew, if he were amused.

While he lives John Thorn will not forget the voice of Feng Me-lah singing the Hour-of-the-Ox away in the chill night dark of the Western Hills.

She sang of three long-ago princesses whom life had thwarted and of whom a Chinese poet had versed his exquisite masterpiece. Thorn could not understand a word of it, but he thought it the saddest and the sweetest singing he had ever heard.

Perhaps Feng Me-lah thought it too sad to have sung to a man she was trying to cheer in the bitter cold of night on the Western Hills. For, a moment after she had told, in a voice that sobbed but never broke, of the "sands of gold" that "over their withered heads they strew, thinking them flowers," Feng Me-lah broke into a merry tune that throbbed and lilted through the Chinese night deliciously—impish laughter in intricate trills of rapid time that neither tired nor wavered—a provocative, intoxicating song all about a sinful frog that disobeyed his mother and got celestial what-for from the very active god whose office it is to amend the manners of ill-behaved offspring. The Manchu girl made it exquisite, contagious music.

Another song answered hers.

"By George!" the man murmured excitedly, not realizing how clearly he said that he heard this new singing even sweeter than hers had been.

The dark hillside was bathed in music. The air quivered liquid beauty. Higher and higher, sweeter and sweeter rose the song. Clearer and nearer the exquisite notes sounded, radiant, jeweled, marvelously tender, unstinted, the miracle of song. Their senses ached to the throbbing song—the man's and the girl's, forgetting the darkness, forgetting the chill of

the hour, holding their own breath to listen the more devoutly to the nightingale's rapturous love-song. Again and again it beat the air with indescribable fragrance of sound; tears and desire, heartache and triumph, blended in quivering melody. It spilled its swelling liquid poetry through the night in trembling tender cascades of jewels that sparkled radiance in the dark—or perhaps that was the naked beating hearts of fireflies that had come to listen to the exultant, pleading, passionate love-song of the nightingale.

It was good to be lost—for this.

As the lovely lilting music ceased at last, and did not come again, another wide swath of light swept the sky, and the man and the girl looked into each other's eyes and smiled.

They knew that they never would forget that nightingale music, or forget that they had heard it together—alone at night on the Western Hills.

Thorn saw a pulse beat in Feng Me-lah's throat. (Her high Chinese collar had slipped a little as she leaned against the trunk of the oak tree.) Feng Me-lah saw the man's face quiver. She saw an emotion that was virile, but not unkind, flame in his eyes.

Then it was black dark again.

Neither spoke.

The nightingale sang no more.

Thorn clenched his hands on his knee. He knew that he nearly—very nearly—had sought and found Feng Me-lah's hand with his. Thank God he hadn't—it would have been the act of a cad—up here alone in the hills—at night.

There was not one fiber of cad in John Thorn. He bit his lip, hoping the girl had not seen his hand move towards hers—if it had.

Of what the farther consequence might have been,

if he had caught her hand in his—or if there would have been any—Thorn had no thought. But he had forgotten that they were of irreconcilable races; he only remembered he was a girl's guardian here at night in the hills.

Feng Me-lah had not seen Thorn's hand move—it had not moved at all. She had not felt his impulse to lay his hand on hers. If she had felt or sensed it, she would not have misunderstood.

She smiled softly as she leaned her head again back against the old oak tree. Quick to such things, as are all of her race, a stray word of his once or twice had made her suspect that an artist lurked in this often matter-of-course, never very suave American man. Now she knew it. His face quickened by a bird's song had told her, and Feng Me-lah was glad. Art's fellowship is eager. And she knew that now their friendship was a warmer, stronger thing, and would be—thanks to a nightingale. The Chinese are like that.

An hour passed—Thorn believed it two—and he caught a rhythm of breath.

As silently as he could he lit a match—and looked. He had been right. Feng Me-lah was fast asleep. She looked very tired, poor girl. She must be horribly cold. He was.

He put the burnt-out match down carefully. It might have tinkled against some dry twig if he had tossed it away carelessly. Even so small a sound might have waked Miss Feng—in the night's utter stillness. She must not wake up; she must sleep and rest until day and day's warmth came.

He slipped off his coat, with perfect quiet, slid over to Feng Me-lah noiselessly, and held his breath, lest it make any film of sound, as he put his coat about

her, even daring to tuck it in with cautious gentleness between her shoulders and the tree-trunk.

She'd be better like that!

He crawled back to where he had been as noiselessly as he had gone to her.

Lord, it was cold!

He found his cigarette-case where he had left it on the ground. He took out a cigarette, counted those left in the case, frowned in the dark, and put back the one he had taken. What a lot they had smoked! Only four left.

A night-owl hooted. Thorn cursed it. But—no, Feng Me-lah did not stir.

Lord, but it *was* cold.

And there were fools at home who thought China was a hot place!

His arms began to ache with the cold that nipped and bit them. And John Thorn thanked all his stars that his coat was flannel—not one of those duck contraptions that most White men wore over here. He wished it was thicker flannel though, the old gray coat he had tucked over Feng Me-lah as she slept.

CHAPTER XX

JOHN THORN sat like a stoic. Men have been decorated for as little.

He had to, of course. His legs longed for exercise and for the half warmth it would give them. His arms did, too. And he told all four of them to go to the devil. It might wake her if he got up and moved any; stamped his cold-frenzied legs or beat his chilled cramped arms on his thin-shirted breast. And

there were fools who said silk shirts were warm. Lord!

What a considerable number of fools there were in the world—come to think of it.

Another owl cried.

Was that another bird? A bird that slept at night and woke at day? He had heard something.

Perhaps it was almost day.

He'd like to know; but he was not going to waste a match finding out. They might need all their matches. He wished he knew just how many matches he had left. But he would not count them. His fingers were too cold. And he might drop some. His was a waiting game to play.

Well, he was waiting, wasn't he?

He put his hands inside his thin silk shirt to warm them. It was colder in there, and his cold fingers made his cold breast colder. He took his hands out again.

It grew colder and colder.

The ice-shaft of that cave they'd been in to-day would seem June-like to this.

He'd been in the chill-room of a friend's packing-house on Halstead Street, and he'd thought it cold. But it hadn't been. It had only been coldish. This was cold.

Real estate business in the city of Chicago had left John Thorn little time to search far into a number of other things that many of his countrymen (and more especially women) found convincing—even if he had had the wish. But he read the daily papers. He had heard of a Frenchman named Coué, of complexes and things, and he had heard of Christian Science. He had been to an experience meeting once too. He'd have a shot now at both of those.

It was not cold.

His feet and hands were not numb.

He did not ache.

It was getting warmer and warmer every minute.
Of course it was!

Warmer and warmer.

The Fourth of July wasn't in it with this.

But John Thorn did not develop well as a Scientist. He did not seem to get the hang of it—not up here on the Western Hills of North China.

What about Suggestion? Self-suggestion, wasn't it? He'd heard a lot about it. He wished he'd listened more attentively when he'd had the chance.

Shivering as with a palsy, his teeth chattering miserably, Thorn set himself resolutely to think himself warm, to recreate for his warming every very hot thing he'd ever felt, touched or tasted.

Turkish bath.

Sausages sizzling hot.

Red-hot cook stoves.

Typhoid fever.

Boiling water spluttering out of a kettle.

Chicago in August.

That wasn't worth a cent either. It was too complex for him.

Feng Me-lah must be half-frozen. He'd see it through, of course, and bob up serenely in the morning, but what about her?

Not because he was shivering, not because his soul as well as his flesh ached with cold, but because she was a girl probably shivering, too, even in her sleep, catching no end of a cold, he dragged himself back to Feng Me-lah. He was afraid she'd hear his stiffened joints creak—but it could not be helped.

She still slept.

He was thankful for that.

As lightly as their cold stiffness would let him he touched her face with careful fingers.

She felt pretty cold. Poor little girl—all worn out—and so cold!

John Thorn gathered Feng Me-lah into his arms, and held her against him so as snug as he could—careful to rob her of none of the old tree-trunk's broad shelter, careful to let none of his coat slip from her, scrupulous to take none of it from her for himself.

It was growing warmer. He was, at least. And he was glad to think that the girlish body he held close to his own—reverently—must be getting warmth from him as he knew that he was from hers.

Steel-gray crept into the black of the sky. It was imperceptible to human eyes; but it was there, and the man holding Feng Me-lah close in his arms, at last could see the dark of the sky. That was something. Nothing lasts forever; not even the Hour-of-the-Tiger on the forest-shrouded Western Hills of Chihli. Dull opal tints made fainter the murk of the gray dark. A shiver of saffron, a whisper of rose, threads of apple-green, javelins of crimson; slowly, imperially beautiful, a long panorama of splendor, barbaric, blinding now, glowing prodigality of metallic coloring, another day had risen over China, one more day had come to the long myriad days of human history. The day-star had come back to Chihli.

Birds woke and chirruped in a thousand trees.

The cedars showed black again against the red flame of the gorgeous sky. The trunks of the ash trees showed silver again. Rowan-berries were beads of pink, the stiff nobs of the sumach showed red-

black. The bamboos quivered their delicate welcome to the sunrise.

Feng Me-lah stirred. Or had he imagined it?

Thorn took his sheltering arms away cautiously; moved away very quietly.

He had put his arms about a girl's waist at a fool picnic years ago; and he remembered how she'd screamed before she giggled, screamed not too loud though. It had been almost a confidential scream. He believed that Feng Me-lah would neither have screamed nor have giggled if she had waked leaning against him, his arms holding her so. He felt that he could trust Miss Feng not to have misunderstood.

But why should she know?

Why bother her with it?—if it would have bothered her.

She was a dear little thing—proud, simple, brave, above all maidenly. No end of a good pal he'd proved her. What a wife she'd make some lucky Chinaman!

Her breath had come to him sweet and pure like a baby's when he had bent over to pull the coat about her more snugly. Her face when he had just touched it, to feel if she was quite perished with cold——

Some lucky Chinaman; lucky, Lord yes!

What was he going to get for her breakfast? And how and where was he going to get it?

The sky was a blaze of rioting colors when Feng Me-lah quietly woke. She was wide awake at once, and she gave Thorn the friendliest smile.

Then she saw his coat, or felt it, still tucked about her close, and she spat out at him in fury, a long tumble of indignant Chinese words that sounded venomous.

John Thorn grinned at her and began to gather sticks.

"We don't let little girls freeze to death in America when we take them out for a walk—not if we can help it," he told her when she paused for breath. "No you don't, don't come bothering here. This is my job. You stay put and be a good girl. If you are a good girl, you shall have a cigarette."

But the Manchu girl would not stay put. She pulled herself up a little stiffly, came to him and held out the coat imperatively.

John shook his head scornfully.

"Don't you see I am working? We Americans take our coats off when we get right busy."

"I am warm like wine now, Mr. Thorn."

"Hot toast is my temperature."

Feng Me-lah felt his arm with a businesslike touch.

"Hot like the ice," she retorted. Then she held out the coat with armholes ready for his hands. "To make me glad," she begged. Thorn heard her voice break a little. Golly, but she was pretty—and she was white—as white as he was!

"Lord, you are only in your stockings! This garden of ours is soaked with dew. You put your boots on quick, or I will!"

"When you have this your tunic on you then will I put my shoes with my feet. I hold it for you."

Grumbling, Thorn let her coat him. But again Feng Me-lah would not let him tamper with her high-heeled Manchu shoes.

"You make fire?" she asked.

"You have guessed it the first time."

"Then I find what we cook."

"You'll be right smart if you do," the man remarked. "I don't notice much provender about."

"I do. Put plenty dry leaves first. Make the fire nice. Take the great care you not let it make spread."

"I'll watch that," Thorn promised grimly. "We won't cook ourselves and incidentally a few hills, not just yet."

While they roasted the bamboo shoots she brought him, after they had eaten a little wild melon almost to its crinkled rind, Thorn made the cigarette he lit outlast two that he gave Feng Me-lah. They smoked in silence. Both were wondering in which direction the temple lay. And Feng Me-lah was troubled to think how anxious their friends there must be. But John Thorn was not thinking of them at all.

Bamboo shoots are very good indeed to eat. You can make a fairly substantial meal of them, if you are sufficiently hungry, and if you eat enough of them. It was nearly twenty hours since they had touched food. They ate enough. But unsalted bamboo shoots with only the juice of one tiny melon and such dew as they could suck from dew-wet leaves to wash them down were a savorless meal. But Thorn and Me-lah salted it with such joking as they could muster.

Was the girl as untroubled as she seemed?

He was troubled more than a little.

Where were they?

How were they to get back?

John Thorn studied that last problem severely while they sat and waited for their dwindling fire to die quite out.

He gave Miss Feng his last cigarette and set his wits to work.

CHAPTER XXI

THORNE did not understand the foul word the Hakka spat as they passed him near the temple steps. But Thorn heard the insult of the Hakka's tone clearly enough, saw Feng Me-lah's painful flush, and understood then what the man had meant, if not what he had said.

Thorn bit his lip hard but let the Hakka pass on; the other was armed, Thorn was not. And Miss Feng had had enough just now without being made the witness of a low brawl. He would know the scoundrel if he saw him again.

Their next encounter was with Hill, the Duchess of Charnley's maid.

The woman sat alone mending lace on the verandah. She rose when they reached her, looked at them deliberately, and passed in front of them into the building, with a cold insolence that was greater and far more inexcusable than the uncouth native's had been.

The American man saw red.

A horrid sob caught in Feng Me-lah's throat.

Aunt Hilda was walking up and down the "drawing-room" hysterically. The Duchess was brooding darkly over an unopened book.

Mrs. Van Vleck began to cry weakly when she saw John and the Manchu girl come in; the Duchess greeted Feng Me-lah with courteous reserve and ignored John Thorn.

Thorn could have throttled them both.

Did the silly old hens think they had lost themselves on purpose—he and Miss Feng!

Feng Me-lah stood wearily waiting, not knowing

whether to go or to stay, pale to her lips. She held her head high, but Thorn saw her hand tremble; too proud to go, too proud to sit down.

Mrs. Van Vleck went on crying quietly. The English duchess suggested as politely as coldly that they might like tea at once.

"You and your tea be damned!" Thorn very nearly said it aloud.

It had not occurred to him—it could not have entered his mind—that either the Duchess or his own aunt would not rush upon them with commiserations and tremulous welcome. Was it nothing to them that they two had been adrift all night in the dark and cold of the Western Hills? Were they women? Cats, he decided.

Elizabeth Kent saw neither Thorn nor Feng Me-lah as she came in from the dim temple-corridor.

"No news? No news yet?" she asked anxiously. Thorn saw that her face was drawn with pain, her eyes circled with ugly dark smudges.

"They are here," Elizabeth's aunt answered coldly.

Then Elizabeth saw them, gave a cry, ran to Feng Me-lah and threw her arms about her, and laid her face against Me-lah's and kissed her.

John Thorn's face softened.

He would not forget that!

It was Elizabeth, her bubbling welcome, her unmistakable sympathy and her confidence in them, at least in Feng Me-lah; that drew their story when she had fed them. She would not even listen until she had done that. She kept her arm about Feng Me-lah as she led her to the dining-room, kept it about her still as she struck the gong resoundingly.

As he went with them John Thorn did what he did not often do. He quoted Scripture to himself.

"Blessed are the pure in heart," leapt to his thought.

The little English girl had won his friendship.

When they had eaten, and Feng Me-lah had told the little Elizabeth would hear "until you are rested," Elizabeth carried Feng Me-lah off to her own room.

"You shall tell me all about it when you are rested, dear. I am going to tuck you in now and make you go to sleep. I'll not leave you—not if you sleep the clock round. But I must give your poor feet a hot soak first, your poor tired feet. Thank God you are safe, you precious Green Pearl you! I have been in agony for you. And you too, Mr. Thorn, thank Heaven you are back safe. Your feet must be dropping off too; give them a hot bath too before you lie down, won't you?"

Thorn fumbled the door-panel a little as he slid it back for them. Elizabeth gave him a cheery smile and put her free hand on his, and said, "Thank you for taking care of her, Mr. Thorn. I'll take care of her now. And you see that you have a jolly rest."

John Thorn gave Elizabeth's hand a grip—his only answer.

Elizabeth Kent knelt on the floor and washed Feng Me-lah's feet very gently. Elizabeth's eyes filled when she saw the bitter bruises. She bound the girl's swollen feet with lingering, pitying fingers.

"Lean on me," Elizabeth begged as she took Feng Me-lah to the opened bed. And when she had settled her, Elizabeth bent over her and caressed her before she kissed her again.

In their extenuation, if it is any, both the older women had had no doubt at all that John Thorn and Feng Me-lah had eloped. Mrs. Van Vleck had been sure that her nephew was going to marry the Chinese

girl, probably had already. The Englishwoman had put a more usual international construction on it when Mr. Thorn and Miss Feng had not returned. Both had been furious. Both had felt disgraced. Hilda Van Vleck had been deeply hurt. John whom she loved! John the only thing that had been left to her now, the only one that really mattered to her!

Neither of them had believed for an instant that Thorn and Miss Feng were lost. They had laughed her to scorn when Elizabeth had insisted that that was why Mr. Thorn and Feng Me-lah did not return. She could not shake their conviction. They did not shake hers.

Elizabeth had sat waiting and listening out on the verandah all night long. She had sent out searchers. Elizabeth had known.

So sure had the aunts been of their own conclusion that they both had been more stunned than anything else when the wanderers had walked in. A poor excuse for a scanty welcome that seemed nothing short of heartless to a young girl who was their guest—a motherless girl.

When she had realized that John and the Chinese girl had come back, Hilda Van Vleck did not doubt that John was going to tell her that he was married. Married to a Chinese girl! Or, at least, betrothed! Hilda Van Vleck knew nothing at all, even now, either of how such things had to be conducted in North China or of how long they took.

All of which John Thorn, had he known it, perhaps, might have felt some excuse for them—at least for Aunt Hilda; perhaps not.

But John Thorn knew nothing of all this. He felt that he loathed the English duchess. He believed that he hated his aunt. He despised them both.

He gave them a wide berth and nursed his anger.

Was Feng Me-lah sleeping? Miss Kent did not come to tell him. He neither saw nor heard her. He would question no one else—Chinese, Manchu, Hakka or Christian White.

It was dark again when he heard the Duchess say, "So, there you are at last!"

The Duchess was in the drawing-room again. John was smoking moodily on the temple terrace not far outside an open window. He had not known that there was anyone just inside—or cared.

He smoked on without listening, until he heard Elizabeth say bitterly, "I am ashamed of you, Aunt Joan. I am ashamed that I am your niece. And I am going home—back to England—at once. I'll take Miss Feng back to her father first. She will be treated decently in her own home. Mr. Feng is a gentleman. He has not got a nasty mind."

"Elizabeth!"

"Oh—I mean it. I mean a great deal more than I care to say. It isn't worth it—to waste a word. You and your precious Mrs. Van Vleck! Do what you like. Go where you like. Say—think—what you like. I'm off on the next boat. I'll borrow the money to go! From Mr. Thorn, I think. He is a man. I didn't know him—or China. I know both better now. Or perhaps I'll ask Mr. Lee Wong to lend me what I need—and tell all Legation Street that I have. It will give them something to talk about—the sort of thing they like."

John Thorn carried his cigar to the other end of the terrace—out of ear-shot.

Elizabeth Kent had won his fealty.

He strolled into the dining-room the next morning because he knew that Miss Feng was there—to take

care of her, if Elizabeth Kent needed any help at that.

"No," he told Mrs. Van Vleck, "I have had my breakfast some time ago. But not bamboo sprouts, Miss Feng. Good morning, how are you?" He crossed to her pointedly and held out his hand, held it out until he had made Feng Me-lah give him hers.

Thorn did not need to hold out his hand to Elizabeth Kent, if he wished to shake hands also with her. Elizabeth held out her hand to him.

"Have another cup of coffee then," she demanded. "We are all going on a picnic, and you are to take us. We can't spare our only man. We want to see the charcoal-burners' camp you and Me-lah saw yesterday. Aunt Joan and I will tramp it. Your aunt and Me-lah are going in chairs. You can have a pony, if you like. Sit down and have a cup of coffee."

Thorn obeyed and took the chair next to hers that she had pushed back as she spoke. But "No coffee, thanks" was firm. He would not break bread with his aunt or hers. But he saw the message in Elizabeth's eyes, "Let it go—for Me-lah's sake."

What amends had the aunts made? He'd like to know that. What apology had they given? Some, he was sure. Both the girls seemed satisfied. It was a friendly quartette that he had found breakfasting together when he came in armed and angry.

Well, if the girls were satisfied, he would hold his hand for a bit, his final judgment in suspense. He believed that no half amends, no inadequate apology would have pacified Elizabeth Kent. He had heard the quality of her anger in her voice last night and he had loved it, applauded its justice, revered its maidenliness.

But he would not break bread with them—not yet, if ever. He'd have details first from his aunt, when

Miss Feng was not about. (The Duchess could go hang!) What had satisfied two girls might not satisfy him.

"Wentworth and Lee Wong must look after you at the picnic, Miss Kent," he told Elizabeth. "I have business in Peking to-day. You should have a man or two here with you while I am away, of course. I have sent for Wentworth and Lee. They ought to be here about now. When they come, I go."

"How did you send?" Elizabeth asked.

"Two runners on two donkeys."

Feng Me-lah laughed teasingly. "Runners—Chinese runners—don't ride on donkeys, Mr. Thorn; they run."

"All right; the donkeys will run then."

"Have you ever seen a Chinese donkey run? It is not our Chinese donkeys' habit," Feng Me-lah said with a naughty giggle.

"These two will. I told the equestrians who bestrode them what would happen to *them* if they did not hand over my chits to Lee and Wentworth chop-chop," John Thorn stated grimly.

"You begin to speak Chinese beautifully," Miss Feng said softly.

"Like a native," Thorn agreed.

"Like a Han-lin," Feng Me-lah amended. "Mr. Lee Wong will not come," she added.

"Jim Wentworth will come all right," Mrs. Van Vleck said significantly.

"They'll both come, when they read my chits."

"Not Lee Wong," Miss Feng insisted.

"Why not?"

"She has him busied."

"And who may she be?"

"The Holy Mother," Me-lah said simply.

"Old Budd?"

"I beg your pardon," Miss Feng flashed back, "you do not speak my language beautifully." After that she ignored John Thorn. Nor would Miss Feng give him her hand when he rose to go, which Thorn did as Wentworth and Lord Arthur Ridley came up the temple steps. Lee Wong was not with them.

He bowed to the aunts, gave Feng Me-lah a long, odd look, that was both amused and tender and also, Elizabeth thought, was a little troubled.

They let him go without a word. Mrs. Van Vleck did not dare question him. When a Thorn jaw was set like that no form of catechism was advisable.

His aunt rose and went to the open window and stood there watching John until he was out of sight. It was she who was pale to the lips now. There was terror in her eyes. She knew the Thorns so well. And she knew the soft folly of most American men; a weakness born of strength and over-generosity—that youth might call chivalry, but that age and experience knew was disaster. Hilda Van Vleck believed that John had gone back post-haste to Peking to get a marriage license; or, at the very least had gone to see Feng Yu. Her heart was sick with what she feared. Her one hope, and it was slight, was Feng Yu.

CHAPTER XXII

PIL TEE had to announce Mr. Thorn twice before Feng heard, or understood that he was not alone.

The Manchu was engrossed in trouble; he had been so for many days. And with each of them it had increased, grieved and threatened him more heavily,

though for a long hour now he had pushed it from him resolutely, giving his sorrowed mind respite in the panacea of a favorite book.

The House he loved was in peril, Feng believed; and his utmost diplomacy and devotion were proving powerless to stem the fast pressing tide of disaster, nor could he persuade T'zũ Hsi to avoid it. She would not believe him. The imperious Imperial-one could not believe him.

Almost Feng Yu was in despair. Weaker, less disinterested counsels than his were prevailing. Doom was written.

Alone in his study he drew out a scroll of poems, brushed long ago by Tu Fu, and began to read. It was characteristic of the man, no less than of his race, that it was so that he sought solace (not snatching at Lethe) in the bitterest hour his life had yet known.

His had been a terrible day at the Palace; almost open broil with his fellows—men of rank and experience used to argue and confer with courtesy and calm deliberation—tempests of tears from T'zũ Hsi. Her bitter weeping had been followed by still more violent upbraidings, scathing accusations, insult piled on insult—at last angry dismissal.

He had bearded her again and again, because he loved her, held firm to the lifelong service he had given her, loved her House, loved China. And Feng Yu feared no woman. Less did he fear any man. He feared neither death nor calamity for himself. But he feared for China. He feared for his Mistress. That dual fear had emboldened him (always except only Jung Lu the frankest of her advisers) to speak and urge her more directly, more insistently than he ever before had ventured. Desperation, China's need, love of the Old Buddha, her lovable, termagant self,

had lioned him to-day in her presence at the Palace, alone with her. He had entreated her, then almost he had commanded her—although in the most vehemement of his pleading and insistence with all the courtesy and reverence that a Feng Yu could not shed in the Imperial Presence.

And he had moved her. The lion in her, and the very woman of her, had quickened to the lion in him, all but yielded to him. And Feng's soul had throbbed with the joy of service well done. Then her mood had swung, and again she had reviled him. The woman's vanity and her ignorance of international truths and potencies had beat him back, defeated him. He would not accept his failure; had not accepted it until he had had to. Realizing that if he would live to fight her again—fight her for her sake and for China's—he must go from her meekly now, allow it to seem that her will and her judgment had conquered his, he had crawled backwards from her presence; had obeyed her and left the Palace, confident that he was right; gone slowly home, almost convinced that he could not serve her again, that she would not permit him to save or aid her.

He had bathed and eaten; had sat a little in his garden with the flowers and silence. Then he had sought his study and a silk of poems brushed a thousand years ago.

Tu Fu had not failed him.

Feng Yu's pale cameo face was placid as Pil Tee, bending at the door-screen, craved to know whether he should admit or forbid Thorn.

Feng welcomed the American with grave but genial courtesy. He showed none of the surprise he felt at the sudden visit of the man he had believed to be at a temple in the Western Hills. Why Thorn had come

probably he would learn. But if he did not, Feng would not question a guest, except in the prescribed interrogations of etiquette. They must be asked, of course.

They were asked and answered—slowly and elaborately by the Manchu, briefly and awkwardly by John Thorn.

Then Thorn plunged.

“Mr. Feng, will you consent to my marriage with your daughter?”

If the ivory frog on his writing table had turned into a banyan tree, the banyan into a Japanese man-of-war, Feng Yu would have been less surprised.

He showed no surprise.

“In your country, as I remember,” Feng said, “it is not uncustomary for a man and a maid to arrange their betrothal without previously acquainting their parents of their decision. Here in my country it is not so. May I ask if my daughter knows of your suggestion that you do me—and her—the great honor to make?”

“I haven’t said one word to her.”

The Manchu bowed.

“Have you given it great consideration, Mr. Thorn? Marriage is of all life-things perhaps the most important. The consequences of every marriage are of far-reach; no intelligence, not the greatest, can compute how far-reaching or how enormous their complications. Even between man and woman of one race, one habit and convention the risk is of all life’s risks the most stupendous. Where the alliance mixes race-bloods the risk is incomparably more, the inevitable clash of personalities, of temperaments, of childhood customs inevitable to every marriage—even here in China we do not altogether escape it—clash for its present and for its fruitage. The ‘mixed marriage,’ you have seen

it in Peking? A few such are received at your Legations—sometimes. I have observed them, Mr. Thorn. Have you?"

"I have seen a few—one or two," John Thorn admitted uncomfortably.

"And?" Feng Yu questioned on, and almost he permitted himself a smile.

Thorn said nothing.

"Have you approved them? Has it been your observation that they were consequented desirably, satisfactorily? My own observation has been otherwise."

Still John Thorn made no reply, offered no argument. Thorn contributed nothing, unless that he squirmed a little in his chair was contribution.

"Have you envied those husbands? Have you highly respected those wives?"

"I hope," Thorn began awkwardly; broke off more awkwardly.

"That the marriage you do me the distinguished honor to offer my daughter, would prove the honorable, giving-to-all-satisfaction exception to what I see you have observed as I have to be an undesirable disastrous rule?"

Thorn nodded.

"Why?"

"Well—you see," Thorn floundered wretchedly, "it's like this: I—I'd do my best. Miss Feng is very lovely. I never met a nicer girl. And—" For the life of him that was as far as John Thorn could get. He could not find one word more.

The old Manchu sat silent, motionless in his great teakwood chair, waiting patiently, watching the other closely, suavely. If he was thinking, considering, apt to blaze into sudden anger or to meet Thorn with cordial acquiescence, his fine face was imperturbable

and his watching eyes were expressionless masks.

Thorn fumbled in his chair. Thorn mopped his face. But his speechlessness outlasted the Manchu's own.

"Mr. Thorn," Feng said at last, "you do not wish to marry my daughter."

"Sir!"

"You do not wish to have Feng Me-lah in marriage."

"I came here to ask it," Thorn asserted quickly.

"I have asked your consent. I ask it again."

"You ask it; but you do not desire it—or her," Feng insisted quietly. "It is my wish that I may understand—understand why you asked it of me."

Thorn moved again uncomfortably in his chair.

"It is my right to know that, I think, Mr. Thorn. I am her father—and I am your friend. It is my right."

Then John Thorn did the manly thing, took the manly way; he told the truth—awkwardly at first, but simply and directly.

"Well, you see, Mr. Feng, it is like this——"

He told it all; the long hours together in the wood, the night alone on the hills, how they had found their way back at tedious last on the morrow, the commotion at the temple when they had returned, the old priest's dark look, the tears of Feng Me-lah's serving women, all except the foul word the Hakka soldier had spat. It he would not tell to the father of Me-lah. He told it all, told it like a man after his first fumbled start; but he ended as feebly as he had begun. And when he had no more to say, Thorn wiped his face again, slouched a trifle where he sat—and waited.

Feng Yu heard him in absolute silence; not a lash moved, not a fold of Feng's robe.

Only when the American had finished, spoken his last word, and it was evident that he had no more to tell, no more to say, the Manchu eyes came to life, flashed before they crinkled.

Then Feng Yu laughed.

Feng Yu laughed until his eyes ran. All his body was crumpled with mirth. His garments billowed and trembled with it.

Desperate, unhappy as he never before had been in all his life, John Thorn stared at Feng in blank and puzzled amazement. That the old chap should take it like that!

It was a funny country—darned funny people. Feng Yu was the queerest of them all.

Feng Yu dried his eyes on his sleeve, belched a great sigh—wearied by his mirth—rose, and gravely held out his hands to John Thorn.

Thorn rose too and laid his hot, limp hands in the fine yellow hands of Feng Yu.

The Manchu hands gripped—never had they gripped a man's hands before, not even a kinsman's hands. In Europe diplomatic usage had disciplined Feng to let his hand lie an unwilling moment in salutation with another's palm—and he had disliked it. Now he shook John Thorn's hands heartily: wrung both John Thorn's hands.

Thorn tried to look the happiness of the accepted suitor—and failed. John Thorn looked like a criminal before the fatal rope.

"I envy your honorable father, born-before-me John Thorn," Feng Yu the Manchu said gravely, "I venture—since your country's usage does not forbid it—to mention your celestial mother and to salute her with my perfumed reverence; she gave life and milk to a man! Forgive it that I laughed. We Chinese

must laugh when the droll thing is spoken or done. We Manchus must; we have caught it from the Chinese probably, from whom we have acquired and amassed so much. We must laugh when we are amused, or make explosion that kills. Because I laughed was not that I did not feel the magnificence of the sacrifice you offered, did not recognize how fine is the soul of you. It was a thing god-like you did, born-before-me. This Manchu person is your baby, old great man you. But it needs not that you make marriage with Feng Me-lah my daughter. The accident of yesterday cannot smirch Miss Feng, or inconvenience her fair repute. Think not of it again. She will not; she does not. When the storm rages on the sides of Omi, the traveler takes what shelter he can. I rejoice that my daughter, very dear to me, had the shelter of your companionship in her lostness. Deeply I thank you for your care of her. For it, while he lives, make you what command you will of Feng Yu your servant-one."

Then Feng brushed it aside, would no more of it. He clapped his hands for wine and sweet cakes, commanded ginger and his musicians; made John Thorn very welcome, kept their talk easy.

Only at the outer door, when Thorn would stay no longer, Feng Yu said gravely, in an odd low voice, "When their holiday in the hills is done, might I, who know so well our climate and its perils to those of the West-of-the-Ocean, advise that you escort your honorable ladies away from China? Our heat grows; soon it will blister."

John Thorn of Chicago passed between the bowing servants at the outer gate a greatly relieved American.

He was not a little obliged to Mr. Feng. Nice old chap! China had its good points too, hanged if it

hadn't!—a country where a girl was not damaged, either in her own eyes or others' by any innocent accident, no matter how regrettable. A fool of a priest, a hound of a Hakka, two blithering waiting-maids didn't count.

Feng Yu watched John Thorn out of sight, with gleaming eyes. Feng had lived too long in the West, had understood and gaged the Chicagoan too well not to realize what a stupendous sacrifice Thorn had offered, and how chivalrous.

"I rejoice," Feng Yu reflected, "that I let him say it all, make to me his explanation, and that I did not summon my servants to beat him and throw him through the gate as was my anger's impulse when he said, did I consent to give to him my fragrant-lily? Truly did Our Most Eminent say, 'On Matters beyond his ken a gentleman reserves his judgment.'"

Back in the *shu-hia* Feng Yu took up the scroll he had laid down when Thorn had come. Once more his old shoulders shook with mirth; then his face quivered but not with mirth, for he was remembering T'zū Hsi and her peril.

Then Feng Yu unrolled the silk, and read.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON a marble terrace (more beautifully designed, more exquisitely carved than anything in Europe) T'zū Hsi and Feng Yu sat teaching their fingers to be worthy to touch jade.

The lovely terrace sparkled like snow, the lake below sparkled like frosted silver. A thousand crimson lotus flowers, open wide, half open, buds, were lifted

proudly on their gleaming polished stems several feet above their great flat jade-green leaves that lay close on the water's silver shimmer.

Two Manchu palace-ladies, brave and decked in their court dress, stood behind the Empress. Li Lien-ying, the chief eunuch, still farther behind waited sulky for the Old Buddha's orders. Li Lien-ying's star was low to-day; no stool for him to-day. It was not for Li to sit in Her Majesty's presence or unbidden to address or to approach her—Li Lien-ying who was licensed to all these and more when the mood served. It did not serve to-day. For this nonce the often pampered, always powerful Li was the meanest of her things.

Feng Yu whom she had berated and dismissed overnight had obeyed her summons at dawn in deep fear, if entirely without trembling. Feng Yu did not know how to tremble; the centuries had bred him too fine for that, both soul and body. But fear is a giant quality: such fear as he had felt when her hot-speeded messenger had called him back so soon, so unexpectedly. It was not fear for self that Feng Yu felt. It was fear for her, fear for the tragedy of blunder he foresaw, fear for China. The night would have augmented her wrath; the astrologer would have fanned it; Li Lien-ying the Eunuch would have fed it in a dozen sinuous ways. Li Lien-ying was master of those. Probably Li hated him as much as he hated and despised Li. The astrologer En Yüan certainly did. Feng had thwarted them both at various times. They were banded now, they and Prince Tuan, Kang Yi and a score of others, to thwart and ruin him. And their enmity was all the more powerful because they believed that they were right and Feng Yu wrong in the advice given to the Old Buddha. None of them wished China's downfall. They all were one in that.

Their variance lay in the methods they advocated for China's service, advocated with the eloquence of sincerity. They gaged Western influences, Western power differently. That was all. Even Kang Yi, the vainest, most self-seeking of all T'zū Hsi's *entourage* far and near, loved China before self—would have sacrificed himself for China without hesitation or regret.

Feng Yu was afraid to approach the Dowager while her rage flamed fresh against him; he knew her so well, knew that in her fury at him she would outrun the not slow "anti-foreigners" pace her courtyard-narrow woman's judgment set. He feared that in lashing him T'sū Hsi would gash China—perhaps irrevocably. And T'zū Hsi would lash him hard to-day.

T'zū Hsi had greeted him with a tender smile, and Feng Yu wondered if he did know her at all. Did any one?

She sometimes smiled and cajoled before she struck. Feng Yu did not forget that. But this was no mock friendliness that she was showing him now. It was as sincere as it was radiant. Li Lien-ying's sullen face told Feng that, and the untroubled faces of the attendant ladies assured it. Hsü Wing would not have bowed to him so unmockingly had she not known that the Old Buddha was his friend again. Never was she but the mirror of the Dowager's mood. And Pan Ch'i would not have been so glad-eyed and stood there so at her ease if Li Lien-ying's influence had not been shattered, if only for the nonce. Pan Ch'i hated Li Lien-ying only less than she feared him. Feng Yu knew that assuredly; for Pan Ch'i was as transparent as Hsü Wing was deep. For whatever reason, T'zū Hsi's mood had swung wide since she sent him from

her at the Hour-of-the-Snake. Feng Yu's hope leapt again.

"Come near," the Empress said as he *ko'towed*, and there was more request than command in her dovelike voice.

That had been an hour ago, and through it all her honey-mood had sweetened more. There was little she might not grant him now, if the gods would but grant that she gave him the chance to ask it. He could not speak of China's sorrows, must not broach with word or look China's peril, unless T'zū Hsi broached it first. Were she silent, he must be silent. If she spoke, his reply must cling close to the subject of which she had spoken to him. And he would not choose, if the choice were his, to petition her within ear-shot of Li Lien-ying, not even within ear-shot of her attendant ladies, one of whom he knew his friend and friend to his cause.

Never had Feng Yu known T'zū Hsi gentler or more seemingly happy.

She had sent for the lacquer bowls that rested on their laps, had tested the hot-cold of the water with which Hsü Wing had half filled the bowls from the heavy embossed ewer of solid gold that a slave-girl had brought, tested its fragrance daintily when Pan C'hi had crushed and crumbled a perfume-lozenge into it. She had scrutinized each round pebble they had brought on an ivory dish before she divided the pebbles impartially between her own yellow lacquer bowl and Feng Yu's rose-and-blue one. She herself had dropped each pebble softly into the scented water.

They sat side by side teaching their fingers to be worthy to touch jade, training their finger-tips to the utmost enjoyment of jade's textures and smoothness.

The art of "feeling jade" is almost as fine, almost

as intricate and difficult as the art of jade carving is—in China.

In China the jade-cult and the jade ceremonials, though much less general, almost confined to the sash-wearers and to the leisured, are as established and as cherished as the tea-cult and its ceremonials are. Of these two intensely Chinese cults (crudely aped by adjacent peoples, of course) the jade-cult is at once the more beautiful and the more difficult.

The Chinese value jade for its beauty; beauties of color and of sheen. They value it for the beauties of shape and of delicate, melting outlines into which it can be cut; value it for the beautiful things and things of beautiful use into which it can be shaped and carved. They value it for its history. The Chinese value it for its significance—varied, exquisite significances. Perhaps they value it most, enjoy it most, for the feel of its texture, “the thoughts that arise” when “cultured-of-the-nine-times-honorable-jades” finger-tips caress and reverence the firm rose-petal smoothness of its skin. And these are the insensate, bestial, heathen Chinese, the pariahs of Asia, less than the Nipponese, poor wards of a smug league of smug Nations, pawn of Christendom!

There was no jade here, not even a button of it. Yet it was worship of jade that T'zū Hsi and Feng Yu her friend and servant were paying, sitting there on the Steadfast-in-Meditation marble terrace overhanging the Lake of Eminent Beauty where the tall lotus flowers grew and the gold and silver fish with their fan-shaped tails of filmy orange chased the sardine-sized paradise-fish between the floating lotus plants. The iridescent paradise-fish swam with their bright red tails reared above the water. Their gleaming red-striped bodies looked impish as they darted

through the pellucid lake—the daintiest, most agile dancing-fish in Asia.

The Old Buddha and Feng Yu were rolling the little round pebbles over and over with their finger-tips, their fine hands knuckle-deep in the tepid, scented water, because that is the treatment that best trains finger-tips to examine and judge, and to enjoy by touch, the texture and polish of jades.

The pebbles must be hard, perfectly round, beautifully smooth, and of equal and prescribed size and weight. The finger-tips that can juggle without one slip a dozen such pebbles at once in a bowl of water can test jades, find every flaw, estimate values and varieties, even age, with amazing accuracy. T'zū Hsi could read jades in the dark as readily, as accurately as the educated blind can read Braille. "The Chinese," Cobden, quoting Admiral Cochrane, told Parliament in 1845, "are an ingenious and civilized people who were learned when our Plantagenet Kings could not write, who had logic before Aristotle, and morals before Socrates," and the Lords and the Commons at St. Stephen's laughed, it is said. But Sir Thomas Cochrane was right. And the Chinese read with their fingers centuries before blind Homer was led through the streets of Athens, thousands of years before science attempted to solace their dark for the blind of the West. God who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb also has granted compensations to the "heathen Chinees."

Of all her four hundred million subjects none could read jade so quickly or so perfectly as T'zū Hsi. Call her bad, if such is your mental attitude; call her tigerish—which she often was; call her inconsistent (a good enough synonym for woman); call her minx, arrogant, but dare not say that she was not a stupen-

dous woman, stupendously, marvelously gifted. There was little she could not do, in her scant hours of relaxation, better than the best skilled of all the master artists and craftsmen. She could tell the color of a flower in the dark. When night had blindfolded her eyes, her fingers knew whether a jade was Imperial, camphor or red, green or kingfisher, or patched with apple-green or with emerald, knew at a touch if it were one of the rare resonant jades from which they form the finest musical stones, or—best of them all—was her own favorite white mutton-fat.

It is to enjoy jade, not to tell its value, that Chinese girdle-wearers count long hours dabbling little round stones in a bowl of water well spent.

Mutton-fat jade seems flat and colorless to Western eyes. Chinese eyes see opal tints in it. But chiefly they value it because to their sensitive, cultivated finger-tips, its skin is more delicious even than the smoother-than-satin skin of red jade or of kingfisher jade.

Old Buddha called for a towel. Pan C'hi knelt and dried her mistress' fingers.

T'zū Hsi when she had used it herself handed the embroidered linen to Feng Yu; an unique mark of Imperial favor. To be allowed to dry his fingers on the Dragon napkin! That had not been deigned Feng Yu before; not thrice had it been granted to one not of her blood.

The Empress Dowager took it again, tossed the towel behind her, and, without turning her head, bade Li Lien-ying take it to her wash-linen women.

It was a terrible, odious thing to have befallen Li Lien-ying. The eunuch was portly. His obese body quivered as he bent, and his costly, encrusted garments groaned aloud. He shambled off heavily and

sourly carrying the napkin on which Feng Yu had dried his fingers. Hsü Wing and Pan C'hi followed after him carrying the bowls of little round stones and scented water.

And T'zũ Hsi and Feng Yu were alone.

A macaque watched them from a limb of a soap-tree, its eyes as red as the lotus, its fox-like face as vicious as its notorious temper; the worst tempered of all the monkeys. Even T'zũ Hsi could not always tame a macaque, or when tamed could trust him.

She called to it now in a lute-like voice so silken, so warm, so wooingly kind that Feng Yu thought that any jungle tiger, a python from the death-swamps, must have come and crouched fawning and meek at her feet. The fox-faced monkey bared its cruel, hideous teeth in a hateful grimace. T'zũ Hsi's lure had failed her. The macaque sprang from its perch with a cry of rage, and was lost in the willows beyond the soap-trees, scolding and screeching as he went. The raucous voice menaced them long after he had sped from their sight.

The woman sighed before she laughed. And her laugh was sad.

"Resus thwarts me! Life thwarts me!"

"It thwarts us all, Sacred Mother," Feng Yu reminded her.

T'zũ Hsi shook her head in sad agreement. "And always we rebel when it does. You thwarted me yesterday, Feng Yu. I thwarted you. Neither would yield."

The opening the man had been longing for had come. Feng Yu threw himself at T'zũ Hsi's feet.

"Draw your stool closer to mine, Feng Yu," the Dowager commanded. "You may speak. I will hear you to-day. I will hear you calmly—presently.

Say it all. Again I shall hate what you urge. But I will remember that you urge it in love."

"And in duty," Feng added gravely, as he rose and sat again.

"We send our bannermen out to crush those who rebel against us, but we rebel as often as the babies do, we whom ancestral culture, knowledge of the Sages, the sorrow and defeat of a long lifetime should have disciplined into obedient acceptance of each day's defeat. Why?"

Feng Yu made no reply. Her Majesty had spoken musingly, questioning the bamboos and the sky, the tall lotus cups as much as questioning him—questioning herself most.

Nor did Feng look at her face. Few, very few were privileged to look at T'zŭ Hsi even when privileged to speak to her. Of those few Feng Yu was one, as cordially accepted in friendship as trusted in service. But he would not presume to lift his eyes to her brooding face, because the intimacy of what she had said had been spoken almost whisperingly in a voice almost entranced. She would answer herself presently, perhaps. When the soul of T'zŭ Hsi questioned her, no answer less than her own would serve. And Feng Yu knew that the moment for him to avail himself of her permission to "say it all" had not come yet. But her promise would hold, and his patience held.

"We never cease to rebel," the woman's sweet voice went on after a time, "from birth till death." Feng Yu bowed his head. Death is not mentioned in China. As we speak of death, the death fact is not admitted in China. That she spoke the word to him now was the apex of human intimacy.

"Those two are inevitable to us all; birth and death.

We all have been born—no escape from that. Each of us knows that death will snatch and mute us; that there will be no escape from that. We all resent death, resent that we are going to die. Few live to adult years who do not sometimes resent having been born—few who do not have full cause to resent it. But who tries to escape those two inevitable facts between which every human life is leashed and crushed? None. We accept those two great relentless inevitables because we know that we must. But we resent them. Kwan, Hearer-of-cries, how we resent them! How many of us resent our birth, how all of us resent death! We do not rebel, because we know our helplessness between those two great relentless grinding stones. Between them our wills are useless. My will is! When the day comes even I, T'zū Hsi, must mount the Dragon and go. Who will ward China then! Gods, oh gods!" The woman's voice was not sweet now; it was hard and harsh. Her eyes, deep on the fish-rippled lake were heavy with tragedy.

"I think," she said broodingly at last, "that is why we fret and rebel at all the lesser things of life that cross us, give them fiercer rebellion than their own mean smallness merits, try to alter them to our own better liking, spend and break ourselves to conquer them—we do it in our unspoken useless rebellion against the tyranny of birth and death. Even I, Feng Yu, might be sweet-tempered always, even and just of mood, were not my woman's heart strangled by its knowledge that I must die. Imperial funeral pomp will not recompense me for that!"

Feng Yu, who loved and revered her, lifted his eyes to T'zū Hsi's face. It was pale as white jade; Feng's heart leapt because pain and anger neither disfigured nor wrinkled it. The man's eyes brimmed

with his pity of the great imperious Queen-One. And he knew that he never had seen her more beautiful, more Imperial.

"That is a great thought that my Royal Mistress has spoken in the hearing of Feng Yu her slave," the man said softly. "And never remember I to have heard it before."

"It is a terrible thought, Feng Yu my friend," the woman said sadly as she rose.

Because she gestured him to, Feng walked close at her side, not following her, but her comrade as she moved along the terrace, through a glade of lilies and dwarf-trees, past the slender shaft of a needle pagoda, over a meadow of late violets, past the high-raised geranium beds, past a great bronze lantern taller than a man, over a humped bridge, through a forest of ferns, until they came to a wall of jasper-framed panels. It was not high, not quite five feet, but its length was several times its height. At both ends it stopped abruptly. A little world of yellow roses grew at the East end, a world of tiger-lilies at the West. Most of the panels were decorated; a few were bare and blank. On one panel a picture was painted, bold and elaborate; on one the picture was graceful and delicate; one wore a poem; one but an autograph.

T'zū Hsi paused at her wall-of-friendship.

Most Chinese gardens of circumstance have friendship-walls. Feng Yu's own gardens had.

Even in Asia it is only in Chinese gardens that there are friendship-walls; long erections of thin masonry on which friends greatly valued and loved are asked to brush or cut in memento and remembrance a sentiment or a picture. The friendship-wall is greatly loved and greatly honored. Always its site is anxiously chosen. It is put where it will most

beautify and will stand amid most beauty; friendship's adjunct to the beauty of trees, flowers and vista which it never must be allowed to mar.

T'zū Hsi's friendship-wall stood where her own personal garden—sacred to her own use—was loveliest.

"Say it now," the Old Buddha bade suddenly. Her level voice was firm. Thing of moods and of instant flares as he knew her, Feng Yu had no fear that T'zū Hsi would attack him to-day. She had promised to hear him calmly. Her promise would not be damaged by a sharp breath or a ruffled glance. But her eyes pleaded with him to spare her such hurt as he could. It was hard to hurt her *here*. But for China——

Feng Yu looked at the characters Feng Ch'in Hsien, his wife, had painted on the proud record-wall of an Empress' friendships; the record of T'zū Hsi's affection and respect, and he said:—

"As the bamboo bends in the storm, lest it break, we must bend, seem that we bend, in defense of our imperiled people, Great Majesty. We cannot crush the peoples of Europe. They can crush us. We can destroy their Legations here, exterminate every foreigner in Peking. They will come but the more to revenge and punish. They will exact and enforce terrible penalties. I as your servant have lived among them in their distant lands. I your servant know their metal. Feng H'swa my son serves you now at a Court of Europe. He finds them as I your unworthy slave found them. Their armies and armaments grow every moon. The art of war is theirs. All the world will unite to crush China, if we persist in our attack upon the Legations we have granted them here. They could exterminate China in four moons after their united forces reached our shores. China

cannot fight the world. China may master the world in long centuries to come, if she waits and is wise. But never, I believe, will it be by wage of battle. To-day we could not conquer Japan! Our troops are not equipped to face the modern-trained and armed forces of even one such foe. We must learn of them, of the nations of the West, before we have even shadow-chance to prevail against them. Forbid the Boxers to attack Legation Street. Forbid them to fire the French Cathedral. They are a senseless rabble, as useless in war as they are ignorant and coarse. Their boasting of charms and immunity will be whimpering death-cries when the guns of the Western soldiers come. They will come, Fragrant Presence. Their marching feet will trample all the rice-fields of Han till never a son of China shall reap, a Chinese woman eat, a Chinese child rest on its mother's breast. Chinese blood will flood your Empire as never has our Yellow Sorrow. The temples of our gods, the graves of our ancestors will be desecrated dust beneath the shoes of the angered West. Our old and infirm will be tortured and slain. Our youths will be taken into slavery, our maidens given to rape. Nothing that is sacred to us will be spared, nothing be left. There will be neither rice in our south nor wheat in our north. And the fault will be ours. I do not forget the wrongs they have done us in the years gone, the trickeries and insults. But to-day the fault will be ours; for we have accepted their establishment here, we have made treaties with them it is too late for us to reject or eject. We must wait and watch and temporize or give all China to one great polluted funeral-pile, and not one Chinese left to do her filial reverence. The fault will be ours if we incite the alien peoples whose might and war resource to ours is

as Genghis Khan's to a naked peasant babe's. Would Jung Lu ill advise you? He never has failed you. Would Li Hung Chang or Yüan Shih-k'ai mislead you? Would this the least of Your Majesty's worms? Sooner would I give Feng Me-lah to the death by slicing. The Boxer-ones are but vermin. Kang Yi is a fool. Prince Tuan is a traitor. Yu Hsien and Tung Fu-hsiang lie. I do not plead for the Westerns; I plead for China. I myself would lead my bannermen against the Legations to kill and exterminate, though among them are men I trust and have given friendship, if we could prevail. I would put the souls of my ancestors in pawn to sweep the aliens forever from China. It cannot be accomplished. We cannot prevail against them—for a moon, probably—but not ultimately. We can slaughter China, or we can wait, watch and temporize."

"I like not the word temporize," but her voice kept its sweetness; her face kept its calm.

Feng Yu knew that she liked the thing itself much less than she liked the word.

"When have the Westerns dealt justly with us, Feng Yu?" Old Buddha asked quietly.

"I recall it not," Feng Yu admitted.

"Since the day that Hamel landed at Quelport," she began quietly—and she told it all; nothing forgotten, nothing forgiven; a terrible indictment of Christendom. T'zū Hsi the Empress Dowager of China knew her facts. History had been her pastime almost from the day when she had gone as a girl from Pewter Lane to the concubinage of Hsien-Feng. Feng Yu knew her erudition—knew that never sage nor Han-lin had mind or memory more masterly or more equipped. But she amazed him now. Of China's recent years had nothing escaped her? How

had she, in her palace seclusion, gathered it? She had not read it; History had not recorded a tenth of it yet. Probably History never would. She retold it all; a terrible accusation, a hideous recital that well might have withered any honest Western ears that had heard it, accusation and verdict but the more scorching, damning for its quietude.

T'zǔ Hsi had proved her right to hate.

Her diatribe was cold and smooth. She punctuated it with smiles. Except in the cadence of Chinese vocabulary her voice did not rise. Her words were slow, but never halted. Her eyes were clear and steady. She held herself as gentle as proud. Not before had Feng Yu seen her so greatly Imperial, never had felt her so irresistibly womanly. The soul of Feng Yu saluted the soul of T'zǔ Hsi. Under his robe a man's flesh quivered a man's appreciation. His being *ko'towed* at the feet of T'zǔ Hsi, the sometimes termagant despot of Han.

"And you bid me that I temporize, Feng Yu?"

"For China! This thy worm advises it, Great One."

"The advice of a man to a woman, *bids* her," the Old Buddha said almost with the edge of a sharpness on her voice.

"We have been ignorant of their power, Lady. We must pay the price of our ignorance."

"Alas! Ignorance always must pay," the Empress owned, "and its payment is heavy and long."

"And, whatever their injustice has been, we must be just even now to them, Madam Imperial, because we are Chinese."

"True," she spoke the word sadly, reluctantly. "And the Eminent-man whose grave mound the crystal tree guards commanded it."

"They, too, have been ignorant——"

The Empress interrupted with a low scornful laugh. She thought it an absurd statement of a thing blatantly obvious, waste of good Manchu words, almost an insolence.

"—they knew not what we were when they came first here. They often have believed they did right when most they did wrong. Our gods never have instructed them, nor our Sages. I pity their ignorance, Madam."

T'zŭ Hsi smiled. Her narrow smile was hard and stinging; a smile that must have stung Feng Yu, had it been for him.

"They have sinned against us in greed. They have sinned against us in arrogance, the gross arrogance of upstart, uncultured peoples. But, too, they have sinned against us in ignorance. Sometimes they have *meant* us well."

The Empress of China's lip curled.

"As nations I condemn them and pity them. And I fear them," he added.

T'zŭ Hsi bit her lip.

"Are they so greatly powered, Feng Yu?"

"Their power is stupendous."

"In a fight to the death—with us?"

"They would devastate China," he told her again.

There was silence between them. A finch sang so near they might have touched it. Neither T'zŭ Hsi nor Feng Yu heard it.

At last, "We must temporize—for a time—if China is to keep her place in the Sun," Feng pleaded again.

China's place in the Sun!

China's place in the Sun, dependent upon the hated, despised and despicable barbarian's holding his hand!

T'zŭ Hsi the Empress lifted her face to the day-star that rode in its zenith above, raining its midday hour radiance down in fire upon China. And the frail woman's eyes did not waver as she looked full at the sun.

She was fitly set in this acme place of earth's most perfected sumptuousness. Here in the Palace garden, yellow-roofed marble palaces, temples, pavilions, white marble terraces whose exquisite, gleaming balustrades' carving jeweled them in the sunlight about her near and far to the distance. Nothing here was more royal than she; nothing was older. All the ages of China's great history pulsed in the soul of T'zŭ Hsi the Empress; all its lore, all its longtime wealth and might were garnered in her—a tiny, old woman, not aged—standing among her bamboos and azaleas in front of her friendship-wall, the sun pelting its kinship down upon her upraised face, Feng Yu holding his breath at her rekindled loveliness, holding his breath at her great queenliness.

The Empress smiled to the day-star; the day-star laughed down to the Empress.

Neither Feng Yu nor his Mistress spoke. The sun in its hot scintillating seemed to blink, but the Empress Dowager of China did not blink. No lash of her imperious eyes moved.

A rare cloud came; a sky-island of thick-fleeced snow-white, floating leisurely from the Yellow Ocean to Sze-chuan. It covered the sun it could not hide at the great star's living midday hour. The fire of the sun filtered through the great cloud's white bosom, flushing it rose, raining down in quivering softened rose onto palaces and temples, drenching the gardens and balustraded terraces with mildened warmth, kissing to delicate rose the Imperial woman's cameo face, splash-

ing Feng Yu's embroidered skirts, staining his fine amber hands, electrifying into a thousand colored fires the jewels the man and the woman wore, making the record-wall of a woman's long lifetime's friendships a jeweled blaze.

T'zũ Hsi turned again to Feng Yu. Her eyes and her curious smile bade him speak, bade him indeed say it all.

"We must mend them of their ignorance, Celestial Queen."

"It was that I did propose."

"We cannot do it with banner-men, O Empress. Our hour will come; China's hour. I, thy slave, will not be here to see it, to feel its golden warmth. It will not be yet. But it will come, in its time of ripeness—if China waits. Our great day-star will be here to see it come. At the climax-hour of China's world supremacy the Lantern-of-the-day will swing as now above the Sacred Forbidden City and lave and salute it—if now we wait. If we strike now, every weapon we own will snap in our wounded hands; China will be crippled, never perhaps to regain her strength. When China's hour has come the Western world will learn what China is—will not forget that knowing soon."

"Cannot we drive them out now, Feng Yu? Cannot we drive them into the sea?"

"They ride the sea as wind rides the storm, as rose-petals ride the zephyr, as the jockey in their race-places rides his pony; the English-ones do. They all ride the sea as we cannot. We shall learn to ride it. We shall acquire the boat-wings without which no nation can ride it—if we wait. We must not anger them more now. When they are angered they strike. Some of them strike hard. But their memories are

short. Benevolent Countenance, let them forget, let them drowse. Let China's memory be long. Decree that we wait. By waiting now China may win, by striking now China must lose. On the clock of the nations it is not China's hour yet. We cannot drive them out now, Benevolent Countenance; it is too late. They are here too far. We can butcher those that are here. We cannot drive back or stay the oncoming Western tide. We can use it. Or we can let it submerge and drown us. There is no third thing we can do, Divine Mother."

"Tell me, Feng Yu, does not liking of them blind you, sway your judgment?"

"Not by one hair," Feng Yu said gravely, "not by the weight of a mustard grain. I like not one of them, those peoples of the barbaric West. There are ones among them, individuals, whom I do hold in kindness and in respect. Those I am loath to see slaughtered or tortured. Among each of those barbarian peoples that intrude on us here in what they dare to call their Legation Street there are ones that are men, some that are gentlemen, some few who would give China courtesy and honest dealing, and do, as little far as their chancellories will let that they do."

The Empress shrugged. But she said musingly, "It is so that Li Hung Chang also says."

"Li Hung Chang is wise and true," Feng urged.

"But Yu Hsien and the auguries——"

"The augurs do not all speak in one voice," Feng ventured.

"No!" T'zŭ Hsi cried. "If they did, not you or Li Hung Chang, not Jung Lu or Yüan Shih-k'ai, not all the men who are to my council should sway me the width of a hair, Feng Yu."

Feng Yu did not doubt that.

"It is my perplexity that not the soothsayers, not the wizards, not the hsien-jen even, read the portents in agreement. Even the astrologers do not read the stars in sameness. And I am but a woman, Feng Yu, a woman weighted with China's myriad needs, China's perils, all China's ills, her past, her present, her future. Only a woman, always buffeted by the anger-winds that blow from all the compass-points to meet and snarl in quarrel about her. A woman who often is very tired, old friend. You have said it all now?"

Feng Yu bowed.

"Then let us sit and listen to the flowers."

She sank wearily on to the phoenix-and-ape-carved stone bench when she had reached it, and when Feng Yu would have knelt at the prescribed distance she motioned him to her side.

Had he won or lost? He did not know. He must not question her of that.

He had done his utmost—the rest was with the gods.

Feng Yu rested. The garden laved him.

For an hour they sat without further speech; a long Chinese hour, twice the length of a Greenwich hour.

They were glad to be together. Feng Yu was glad because he loved and revered the Imperial woman he served as his clan had served hers for a thousand years; and he was not ungratified at the distinguished honor he had, and would have in other eyes than his own, in being here in her own garden-of-gardens with the Old Buddha, she who ruled them all. T'zū Hsi was glad because she trusted him. His judgment she did not always trust; his advice she would not always accept. But always, and in her most termagant, abusive moments even, she trusted the man himself. She loved him for himself; she loved him because of Feng

Me-lah; she loved him warmest for the love and cherishing he had given Feng Ch'in Hsien.

They were glad to be together here in their blessed oasis of peace and rest that they had the courage to snatch, the fine wisdom to enjoy deeply, in the seething caldron of China's burning peril, the cataclysm of China's distraught perplexity that menaced more than the concrete, definable complexity of present peril did.

But neither was thinking of the other now as they sat together on the long stone bench whose carving had been the work of a stone-artist's long lifetime three centuries before.

They were listening to the garden, absorbing its beauties, drinking its peace.

And when they spoke—at last and fitfully—their talk was childish (Western ears would have heard it so) for they were children alone with their mother. Their mother Nature whom they loved, who loved and nourished them. She held them close to her bosom here. They nestled against her, happy and confident; her children, as all Chinese are.

The hot sun of the Pomegranate Month hung high. The garden was a blazing jewel. But it had a delicious coolness; the sweet cool of its delicacy, the deep, gentle cool of its peacefulness.

Arrogant peonies blazed their scorching colors. Yellow roses tangled with red; amber roses nodded to pink; white roses hobnobbed with them all; early poppies and parrot-tulips grew with the mignonette. Scarlet hibiscus gave way to a hill-slope forest of heliotrope that melted into a meadow of yellow iris. But bamboos gave their cool refreshment, and in the sumptuous riot of color the soft greens that shadowed to gray were the most. It all looked accidental; but scarcely a leaf was there that had not been planned.

Gardeners and Empress had studied and schemed anxiously her own garden for years. Wistaria and clematis tumbled from arch and trellis, the red jasmine, the white and the blush were only a little less fragrant than the yellow.

Yehonala knew all her flowers—gave each an individual love. Her flowers knew her and were glad she had come.

She lingered with them and told them “good-by” when she left them at last and went back slowly to the terrace by the lotus pool. She stood watching it broodingly for many moments before she spoke.

“So,” the Empress said musingly, her eyes still soft on the little fish that danced softly in shining orange and rosy apricot in the silvery lotus pool, “we must temporize—for a time.”

“For a time,” Feng Yu repeated as softly, his eyes still fixed on a climbing maidenhair that grew in a clump of anemones and flung its lovely lengths up to a violet lilac that twisted down from gray rocks to greet and embrace it.

“How do we begin, venerable Feng Yu? Send we a pannier of lettuces to the Austrian Legation, a cart high-piled with sweet pink pork to the German, a thousand flagons of the wine of Shantung to the Italians, a pouch fat with gold to the French, scrolls of admirations and praise to the Japanese, tea crated in lacquer to the British Legation, silks to all their women?”

“If Your Majesty would grant them audience—personal audience,” Feng Yu murmured, watching her now, lest he try too far. “It is audience they most crave.”

“Simpletons! It is safety, not audience, they need!”

“But they lack the intelligence to realize that, Great

One. Pamper them with surface graciousness, Heavenly Countenance, and they will take little heed of our gathering bannermen. Safety we must give them also—for our own security and respite, not for theirs—give it without their suspicioning that we do. But, if your Celestial Wisdom would see them in audience——”

“That they may spy? That is their wish?”

“That they may boast. That,” Feng Yu replied, “is more their wish, if I understand the foreign-ones.”

“Their women-ones first?” T’zǔ Hsi suggested.

“The Legation women are of much power,” Feng stated.

“So! Then we make our beginning with the women-ones,” the Old Buddha said lazily. Feng Yu wondered, but dared not ask, whether the Empress intended what she spoke, or if she were but teasing him. “But not of the Legations!”

“Not of the Legations!” Feng Yu repeated aghast. For a bad moment he questioned, without saying it, if Her Majesty intended to admit Foreign Missionary women into her Palace precincts, into her very presence. No! T’zǔ Hsi, mad in her pranks before now, could not do that!

“Take our message to the three with whom Feng Me-lah makes visit at the mountain that when they return to Peking you will bring them to me.”

“Madam?” Feng Yu stammered.

The Old Buddha chuckled softly.

“I have spoken, Feng Yu. Hear it with trembling and obey. I choose to receive them. I will receive no other ones—yet. I will see how I enjoy the visit of barbarian women, before I commit myself to accept in even slight way, the official women who are

wife-ones of my official enemies. It is easy to admit. It may be difficult not to admit again and more far. Each year since the infamous Arrow affair, of which the more decent of their own Statesmen were ashamed and a few had manhood to say it aloud in their Council House, the uncouth, dishonorable ones of the West have pushed in farther and farther, until now they threaten and snarl at the very walls of our Sacred City. They have made picnic on our tombs; their carriages and their chairs push Chinese coolies from Chinese streets; half-caste children pollute our schools; they insult our ears with cheap pidgin-English; they deck their dinner-boards with 'Buddha's-hands'; they think of us without intelligence; they treat Chinese in China with cancerous rudeness. They are vile. Of ease can I invite the Legation women, do I conclude to invite them. It may not be of ease to insist that they come not twice. I will see first the three who are not of the Legations and, also, who stay not here long. Make them understand that they come in secrecy and so go—else not again favor will they gain of us. It may please us to have it known on Legation Street that we have permitted them our own reception; it may not. If they conduct themselves with all propriety—as far as barbarians can"—Feng Yu had no doubt of that—"and if they amuse me"—Feng Yu had more doubt of that—"it may be that presently I shall admit the Legations women. Yes, Feng Yu, I will see the three make-travel ones. Give you them my summons to come. I hold another reason to see them. I wish to see the English-one who is not yet a wife. I will look at her close. For Feng Me-lah has said that she resembles me."

"Madam!" Feng Yu, horrified, thrust out his hands

dramatically. When a Chinese gentleman does that he is moved indeed—distraught beyond smooth self-control which is the gentle's adamant rule.

The Old Buddha laughed. "Perish your fear, friend Feng Yu. I bade the girl speak with frankness. She did but obey. I had to command it twice before she did. It is not my habit," she said with a smile, "to command twice. She obeyed me trembling as the aspen sapling obeys the storm. Why do all my people fear me, Feng Yu? Even little Green Pearl whose mother was Ch'in Hsien the love-sister of my heart when my heart was young. Even Feng Me-lah whom I love as if I had given her suck! Why do all my people who are nearest to me fear me, Feng Yu—even Feng Me-lah?" The Old Buddha's voice broke on its sadness.

"We fear to offend you, Highest One," the man answered soothingly.

"It is more than that," T'zŭ Hsi said grimly.

In a moment her face crinkled with gentle mirth. "But," the old Buddha laughed, "Green Pearl does not fear me always. She fears me least of all my women, even when my tiger is roused and seeks for prey. Even when it would strike, I think that Feng Me-lah knows that T'zŭ Hsi will not strike her—not even when T'zŭ Hsi spits in tiger-rage. Bid her come to me with her three barbarian friends. Tell her that the Old Buddha will beat her, if these eyes see nothing of the Old Buddha's face in the young face of the English minx. Tell that to Feng Me-lah, Feng Yu, and she will not believe you. Feng Me-lah whom Feng Ch'in Hsien milk-named Lu Chu will know that her father lies. Go to your rice, Feng Yu."

Feng Yu threw himself face down at T'zŭ Hsi's feet and left her. Feng Yu crawled backwards like a hu-

man crab, still face down until the bamboos hid him from the Old Buddha's sight.

The proud mandarin, secure in pride, for he was of thousanded proud and noble ancestry, felt it no servility that he crawled backwards from the presence of the Empress Dowager. Feng Yu felt it, as both he and T'zũ Hsi knew it was, only courtliness, Chinese manners, a loyalty that was as sincere as its crawling humbleness was prescribed.

A horrid thing for any man to do! But the Chinese have perverted taste—or none. To them the casual kiss that Western lips give and take is horrid.

T'zũ Hsi sat alone until the day-star sank and the jeweled garden dimmed. None would intrude upon the solitude she kept. None might venture to T'zũ Hsi unsummoned when she sat or paced alone in this garden spot of hers where the spotted lilies quivered at the lotus lake's marbled edge and spilled their fragrance down to the drowsing orange-pink fish in its silver breast.

T'zũ Hsi the Empress Dowager sat motionless among her gentle, scented flowers, searching her soul and theirs, getting nearer to the Infinite through the companionship of beauty.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE tall millet was ripening to its harvest. Much of it was eight feet tall now; some of it was taller. *Li* after *li* it stretched in its splendid strength, wide seas of green turning gold and orange; a world of Chinese millet yellowing to harvest under the burning Lotus sun of Chihli.

Other harvest was ripening in North China—human harvest long overdue.

Legations laughed and sauntered, shrugged and dressed for dinner.

China saw red.

Yüan Shih-k'ai, anxious and troubled, sent trusted runners almost daily from his *yamên* in Shantung to the Sacred Presence in the Forbidden City, with advice and prayer of caution and moderation. "The time is not ripe," was the gist of Yüan's every message. "The time will not ripen," was the sterner gist of much he hinted.

Li Hung Chang backed up Yüan persistently, subtly, craftily, when T'zŭ Hsi's mood would brook no more, openly with all his great eloquence when the Dragon Ear was turned more approvingly to his speech. Liu K'un-yi denounced the Boxers and urged their extermination. T'zŭ Hsi, who suffered most because she loved most, loved China with the mother's love that passes man's, loved China with the monarch's anxious, brooding love that passes far and tenfold the love that subject souls can hold, was sorely troubled, sore perplexed. To-day she exulted, to-morrow she trembled. All days anxiety racked her.

But the Plum Blossom Fists were not anxious. They were confident. To them the holocaust they planned was justice. And, rank and file, they felt themselves invulnerable. No Christian bullet could reach or score them! Their god-blessed cause was their armor, and pills-of-immortality that the Old Buddha's own apothecaries had blended, that the Old Buddha's own hand had given, would preserve them if their armor from the god-ones failed them. Neither Imperial pills nor god-granted spiritual armor could in any circumstance fail them. Their security was double.

If T'zŭ Hsi doubted the spells and necromancies she sought and gave, if Jung Lu and Li Hung Chang scoffed them, the Boxers doubted none. They knew their day had come. They knew that it was theirs to prevail.

Once a *tong* socially exclusive, designed for Chinese culture and for prayer—Kwan herself was their patron goddess—busied elegantly with that, busied or interested by nothing else, its barriers were down now, its membership open to anyone, low or high, who hated the foreigners in China venomously enough and was ready and keen to go to any length (and the more ruthless the better) to wipe them off the face of China's earth—to torture and exterminate them.

Barrow-coolies were many more than the Han-lins among the White Lily Sect's tongsmen now. There were men of might among them; might of brain and the greater might of character. Some of them were men of honor, slow to kindle, slower to withdraw. A few were wise; wise in outlook and thought, wise in counsel. Most were unwashed, unlettered, untaught except in penury's crude inhuman schools; ignorant, superstitious peasants warped of mind, twisted and calloused of bodies that were poisoned and disfigured by bitter overtoil.

But the Boxers were patriots. The worst as the best of the Boxers were that.

It is reiterated in Western print that the "people" of China are not patriotic. It is untrue—one of the absurd and hideous untruths of utter ignorance. Once it was true—in a shallow, superficial sense.

Great China's boundaries are so far-flung, her myriad leagues so uncharted, so inaccessible, so unpathed that only wealth and power could journey far from

the one small patch of one's native province in which one was born.

Since the Chinese girl, even the lowliest peasant girl, might not be given in marriage to any man of her father's surname, the bride often was carried or carted far for nuptial and future stay. (For often all the inhabitants of a village, or even of a wide district are of one family and name.) But the peasant girl was untaught. She could not think in terms of culture, of general intelligence, of national significance. She could neither carry ideas nor receive them. Geography was not even a name to her. She did not know what nations were. A mat to lie on at night, a bowl of rice, millet or beans to eat, a man and a mother-in-law to obey, children to bear, were all she knew, all she might hope. She had her pleasures, and she had her joys too; wayside flowers she might pluck for her hair, raree-shows, festival days, the quick experiences of wifehood and motherhood, not all muted or brutalized by her heavy burden of incessant toil. But her pleasures and joys were local. She could not look, she could not think, beyond the narrow field of her toil. The Chinese lady lived her body's lifetime out in a courtyard, but her mind was more free. She had the culture that travel and education give, and always will, even to one whose whole life may be spent within four narrow walls. The minds of the peasant women could not travel. Their bodies were less physically "shut-in"; toil turned them to paddy-field and market-place; but their minds were "shut-in."

The man peasant rarely wended as far as the girl dark-locked in her bride-chair. He was fast-stuck in the spot of his birth, doomed and glued there as helplessly as the baby penguin that stands too soon on the Polar ice is fastened there till it perishes and

dies. What can it know, or think, of the equator's zone? Except that in a far holy place whose walls were purple there was a Son of Heaven who was all earth's overlord, not to be looked upon, to be worshiped, not to be defined or realized, the man peasant had no conception of anything beyond the range of his own eyes, the needs of his hunger, the common impulses that were his because he had breath. Small scope for patriotism?

Up the social Chinese ladder a rung or two there were books, pictures, traditions, some leisure; and because there were these, there was thought. But family was all. Family was horizon, foundation and boundary of lives enwalled. Such links as they had with the not-far outer world only the headman forged or a little knew. All but the elders of the elders, the regnant patriarchs, were gyved in the homestead fast as he ill-fated penguin baby in the destroying ice. It must perish unless it stands on the broad, calloused, ice-inured webs of its parents' feet. The young Chinese could live only on the safe foothold that family gave, or perish. What seeding of patriotism there?

In a deeper truer sense patriotism always has rooted deep, flowered in abundance and fragrance in China; unconscious patriotism most of it, but no less a patriotism, no less staunch or fine for that! They who are true to the things and needs of the scantiest homes, glad to labor for home, devoted to its simple ideal, quick to sacrifice, eager to spend self for home and clan, are intrinsic patriots, splendidly useful ones, even though they never have heard the word patriotism and do not know their country's name, that it has a name, or how it bulks and outlines on an atlas.

Nepotism is not anti-patriotic. Christendom bears witness that politics often is. Patriotism may persist

in parliaments—even in leagues. But not under rondas, not in the oratory that blue-books monument, is patriotism seeded in human lives, bred in human bone.

Since China's earliest dawn the Chinese have felt and exercised patriotism—less fine, less manly than ours because unlike ours, functioning unlike ours, preaching in terms not ours, practising in ways alien to ours, pushing toward different ideals, toiling in inferior ways for inferior needs, just as Chinese flora, architecture, letters, arts, history, ethics, scenery are "inferior" to ours because they differ from ours.

It must be admitted that there was no patriotism—as we hold patriotism—in old China.

But we have changed that.

We gave China her scourge of misused opium (for opium is a very good thing in sane and honest usage); we gave China the brutal injustice of the Arrow War; we have given her a thousand examples of barbarian greed, cruelty, dishonesty, ruthless chicanery that have beat the drum calling her millions to a new patriotism, a patriotism no longer free to build in peace, but goaded and stung to resent, resist and defend. For our own ends we have forced internationalism upon China. She asked nothing of us, wished nothing of us. We did not interest her. That internationalism forced upon her by us has bruised China into patriotism. To us the harvest of the seed we sowed! We may reap it in disaster; we should reap it in shame. To ask us to reap it in penitence is to ask what we have not in us and, since we have it not, never can give. That one acceptable spiritual payment we never can pay.

None of this did the Boxer rabble know who were

pouring now in tattered human streams towards Peking; trickles of rage and mania that might before the Lotus Month swell into torrential floods of revenge. But the Boxer leaders knew; the men who knew and thought what their rabble followers only felt. The human body's vital parts often are poisoned from without; the poison works in—to be thrown out by the skin and its fellow-workers, if they can. The mind of a people is poisoned, fevered (or inspired and purged) from within; fed, tainted, instigated, weakened or strengthened, diseased or made healthy by the influence and representations of its leaders. What Paris designs to-day Carlisle and Omaha will wear to-morrow, or believe that they do. What T'zū Hsi, T'ing Yung, Yü Hsien and Prince Kung had said yesterday the peasant babies of Mukden and Yunan had sucked in, accepted and believed, understanding it little if any, most of them never having heard of T'ing Yung or even of Kung.

The great fields of great-stalked, thick-growing millet at the edge of Ming Tombs Road were impregnable to Westerns. But Chinese were creeping into it by ones and twos to discuss and foretell, to compare what their fortune-tellers had promised, to wait hidden in its sure cloister until the great war-gong bleated its battle cry afar from the Sacred City's porcelain watch-towers. It was not easy for them to creep into the millet. But they did it, squirming like snakes, tearing their few tattered garments, ripping their skin. They wormed their way far into the millet, sat snug there, half smothered by its height and denseness, comparing threatening gossip, comparing charms, foretelling blood-orgy and plunder.

Behind barred doors in Peking, in the Tartar City,

and in the Chinese, men of rank and of power consulted and planned more quietly, astutely, not less venomously.

And Legation Street danced.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN they heard the preposterous hour at which the Empress Dowager chose to receive them Mrs. Van Vleck said hotly that she for one would not put up with any such impudence. She'd not go near the old heathen cat. Elizabeth laughed. "I don't mind either way," she said.

"Don't be a goose, Hilda," the Duchess coaxed. "Of course you will come. You know you will. Catch you missing it. You can talk about it as long as you live, and you will. For my part I call it jolly decent of the Empress to have us in the cool of the morning, before we are red as beetroot, steamy with perspiration and our hair all out of curl," the English woman added craftily. The Duchess of Charnley's hair never had been in curl, not even in her blue-sashed babyhood. But Hilda Van Vleck's blonder coiffure was curled industriously. It inclined to uncurl on very hot days. "What's getting up a bit early once in a way? I often have had to get up long before six when hunting was good. What's the difference between half past five and a quarter to four? None, if you don't think there is. Go to bed early overnight, and you'll be right as a trivet, if you have your early tea strong."

"I'll be cross as six sticks," Hilda Van Vleck grumbled.

"It will wear off," the Duchess said cheerfully. "As

for you, Elizabeth, many's the four o'clock in the morning you have been dancing in London."

"Staying up till after four and getting up before four are two very different things," the girl retorted. "But I'll go, if you do. I said I would."

"Thank the Lord I'm not invited," John Thorn contributed, "I'd be scared stiff."

"Scared of nothing!" his aunt exclaimed contemptuously. She knew, as they all did, that sheer curiosity would take her to T'zŭ Hsi's palace at gray dawn—curiosity and a queer sort of racial pride. None of the official Legation women had had so much as their noses in there yet. Perhaps they never would, either. "I'll see how I feel when the time comes," she conceded indifferently.

"Whatever is Jack staring at Elizabeth Kent like that for?" his aunt silently wondered. Jack didn't often stare. What was up this time?

Not much. Thorn merely was wondering whether the wave in the English girl's brown hair—nice hair she had—was done with tongs or was natural. It didn't matter. He liked girls to make themselves look nice—with curling tongs and all that sort of thing. And it certainly didn't matter to him how Miss Elizabeth Icicle looked, or whether she did her hair with irons or wore it the way it grew. But he had wondered about it several times. Was that one reason she was willing to go to the Old Buddha woman before the sun was up? She'd look stiffer and starched more than ever with her brown hair slicked down tight. He never had seen the rather cute wave it had come out of curl—not that he had noticed. Much as they'd had to see of each other, he never had noticed her much. Why should he? They did not like each other. At least, she did not like him, and he did not

like her—much. But he had noticed that if it took her time and trouble to fix her hair, she had taken as much up there in the temple—not a man for miles—as she did in Legation Quarter.

Two days later they started for the Palace long before it was light. Their bearers swung lanterns as they went; lanterns were carried before them. Mrs. Van Vleck grumbled at first; a foolish waste of good American grumbling, for no one heard her. They were carried single file. After a little she settled back in her chair's cushions and snoozed.

May was hot in Peking in 1900. (It usually is.) The orange-black dust that has sifted down for centuries from Gobi lay thick on gardens and footways, markets and buildings. Presently when human life stirred about its daily business the shrouding dust would rise in horrid choking sheets, stinging eyes and nostrils, making flesh and flesh-worn garments unclean, lacerating all it touched, touching everything, rising so thick, so high, that it hid the sun whose quenchless heat mixed with it and make it a sweltering, scorching dun-colored fog. There is no rain in the Lotus Month in Chihli; the sun beats down, the Gobi dust beats up, and churning together they make Pewter Lane and Haymarket Street streets of Hell. Well for T'zū Hsi that she keeps her Court in her favorite Summer Palace when the sun blisters down on the lava-like dust of Peking. And well for the three Western women that they journeyed to her while the lesser stars still twinkled all the spectrum's colors and their glinting own in a night-time sky.

They did not start from their hotel quarters, but from the home of Feng Yu, so explicit had the Old Buddha's condition of their admission been; her condition that they were to visit her secretly and unsus-

pected. It could not fail to give great offense to the ladies of all the Legations were it known that before receiving them, or even promising to do it, the regnant Empress of China, the acknowledged ruler of the Chinese Empire, had given guest-welcome to three Western women of no official place in the Legation Quarter. Her regard and esteem for the wives and daughters of the foreign Ministers who conferred upon Peking the honor and advantage of their residence were very great. She felt affection for them. Not for many bales of perfect pearls, not for any advantage of her own, still less for any whim or prejudice, would she slight or grieve them. She waited a favorable time to welcome them, a deliberate conclusion of the respective precedent to be assigned to them when they came, an appropriate program of their entertainment. In the meantime her regard for them would not brook that they might be hurt in their womanly and national sensitiveness by knowing that mere travelers of their sex had been admitted to her pavilion before them.

They were bound by their pledge of silence—the aunts and Elizabeth. Feng Yu had more than hinted that an indiscreet word of theirs would cost his head. They would not tell. Not even Mrs. Van Vleck would tell—yet. If less tight-lipped than Joan, Hilda Van Vleck never had broken her word. She would not do so to the cost of his head to nice Mr. Feng. There would be no harm in telling her own set in New York some day. She certainly would hold her tongue in Peking. As a matter of fact she had no desire to dazzle Peking. Mrs. Van Vleck did not think very much of Peking—European Peking. European Peking was all that there was of Peking now that the cuteness of the capital's Chinese parts had worn off.

It was only because Joan was still here that Hilda Van Vleck stayed.

Much of their road was beautifully paved, for royalty used it often. Corn rustled in the light breeze; the wheat fields were exquisitely green. Every few rods they passed a temple surrounded by its sacred evergreens. As the day broke a little the distant hills were just sketched softly against the sky. The first village they threaded through was fast asleep; half an hour later a second was stirring; a *li* or more took them through a third village that was up and doing hard all that daylight brings to Chinese peasants' incessant industriousness. Wheels creaked at the wells; hand looms purred in the tiny homes; men were threshing their daily bread from last year's wheat; there were barter and noise, the smell of charcoal burning under cooking-pots, children shouting their lesson at school.

Beyond the great yellow Lama Temple, the carved park-walls of princely Manchu homes on either side of them now dripped perfume down on them—the thick, almost cloying scents of a thousand flowers.

Another *li*—or less—and they saw the Summer Palace glittering in the sunrise, its red-pink wall twisted about it like a girdle—itsself a city of green and yellow tiled roofs, parks, marble terraces, glades, orchards, pagodas, lakes and canals bridge-spanned and laden with floating islands of flowers, decorated arches, pavilions, carven triple-roofed tea-houses, hills and undulating flower-dimpled valleys, a blur of jewels, a dream and pageantry of luxury and wealth they had not seen or thought of before, could not have believed, scarcely believed even now.

The Duchess knew Amritsar, Constantinople and Moscow well; the Imperial summer home startled and

amazed her almost as it did her niece and her friend.

At the Palace gate they were transferred into red palace-chairs and carried slowly their still long way to the pavilion in which Feng Me-lah waited for them.

Now, more than a quarter of a century later, the three women are still wondering which was the more wonderful, the more surprising and beautiful: the picture of the Summer Palace as they looked at it from outside its pink walls or the panorama it unrolled for them as they threaded their way from the gate to the Empress Dowager's pavilion.

The courtyards they crossed, the gardens, the white marble terraces they could not count. The buildings seemed endless; flowers and bamboos were endless. Peacocks strutted past immense stone and cloisonné pelicans. Eunuchs swarmed everywhere, smooth-faced, fantastically dressed, head-dressed and bejeweled. Manchu ladies were pelting each other with "snowballs" across a flaming geranium bed. The Manchu girls were dressed almost as splendidly as the eunuchs were but far less fantastically. The lines of the ladies' garments were simple and long. Their embroideries were delicate. Among them they wore every color and tint except yellow. Their shining wide-winged black head-dresses gave them dignity and became them; their hair-jewels quivered and tinkled as they romped. The clothes the eunuchs wore were barbaric, and many of their rayed head-dresses were as large as rickshaw wheels.

If any one idled here, neither the gardeners did nor the birds. The birds were singing lustily in delicious riot. The gardeners were bending over beds, stretching up to flowering vines, sweeping yellow paths already so smooth that they looked varnished.

Elizabeth's heart was beating oddly when the liv-

eried bearers set down her chair. And Hilda Van Vleck was speechless as she followed a eunuch up the pavilion steps.

Feng Me-lah welcomed them quietly with shining eyes. A dozen court ladies gave them the Manchu salutation, but did not draw near. Only Feng Me-lah spoke to them.

Before they could look about the beautiful almost unfurnished room, the group of court ladies parted flutteringly but without a sound; a panel slid back noiselessly and a small woman quietly clad in gray and apricot-yellow came in, with two rat-sized golden-furred dogs dancing about her joyously. Her long straight robe was buttoned diagonally all its length by jade. There were emeralds in her hair and in her silver nail-protectors.

"It is Her Majesty," Feng Me-lah said softly.

"Well," Hilda Van Vleck said to herself instantly, "I never saw a pleasanter looking woman. Perhaps she *can* say 'boo' to a goose, but I bet she doesn't want to."

"I believe they've told a whole pack of lies about her," his aunt assured John the next day, "and what's more, she's ever so pretty."

T'zǔ Hsi smiled when she saw them.

The Duchess of Charnley had seen several royal women smile so in the West; a gracious smile that was unassuming and sweet, but that offered or brooked neither equality nor familiarity. "Whatever her temper is, or her morals, her manners are excellent," the English duchess wrote to her husband that night.

T'zǔ Hsi came directly up to them. She did not have them come to her. She spoke to each of them. Feng Me-lah interpreted.

"I am pleased that you are here. I am pleased that you cared to come. Let us sit down." She motioned the Duchess to the seat on the left of the one she took herself, Mrs. Van Vleck to a seat on her right. But the English girl was seated facing T'zū Hsi. Twice the old Manchu eyes laughed frankly into the young English eyes.

"It is because of Elizabeth we are here," the Duchess said to herself. "She is not at all interested in Hilda, not much interested in me. She is very much interested in Elizabeth. The Empress must be very fond of Miss Feng." Of course it was Feng Me-lah's influence that had gained them this. That was evident. The other court ladies stood carefully, if not stiffly. They were palpably in attendance. They were well-drilled and unembarrassed, even at ease; but the English woman thought them on their guard. Feng Me-lah, though unmistakably reverent in voice and gesture, seemed gaily at home, a child that knew it was loved.

The Empress said that she hoped they were comfortable in Peking. She asked if there was anything she could send them. But that was the only mention she made of Peking. She did not ask how they liked it or what they thought of it. She asked if there was anything that they desired to see that they had been unable to see. After that she spoke of England and of America, not again of China.

The Empress Dowager spoke of England's Queen and of Brooklyn Bridge. She spoke of Central Park and of the Louvre. She referred to Carmen Sylva and to Christopher Wren. "She had been carefully coached for this," the Duchess told herself. "I wonder why." The Empress questioned them of woman's

education in the West and of shops on the Rue de la Paix. She said that she wished she might see Venice and Madrid.

"When you have breakfasted"— So she did realize they had come in the middle of the night! Hilda Van Vleck was glad of that!—"I hope we can amuse you," Feng Me-lah translated as the Empress rose.

A vine, so heavy with flowers that it dragged down over the open casement, had pushed in from the terrace. The room was heavy with the scent of its deep red roses. T'zŭ Hsi paused at the casement, lifted up a rose-heavy trail and leisurely examined carefully several roses only to reject them before she selected one and gathered it and gave it to Elizabeth Kent, laughing down at the girl almost—the Duchess thought—tenderly.

"Aren't we going with her? Where is she off to?" Mrs. Van Vleck whispered as the Empress disappeared through another panel.

"Her Majesty eats alone," Miss Feng replied. "She may rejoin us, or send for us, before you go."

"Well, I call that shabby. We came here to visit her, didn't we?" the American woman protested.

The English duchess was not offended. "Kings and queens come and go at their pleasure—when their guests are not of royal rank too, Hilda. And T'zŭ Hsi is a reigning sovereign."

"A Chinese one!" Mrs. Van Vleck objected.

"Yes—and in her own palace," the Duchess said quietly.

"Well, I'm blessed! Don't you talk to me like Bernhardt to old what's his name, in *Camille*, Jo."

"Let me show you the way," Feng Me-lah suggested quietly; "the meal is in another pavilion."

"Come along, Hilda," the Duchess commanded with

her strong thin hand on Hilda Van Vleck's plump arm. "It will be a jolly good one—our breakfast."

"I hope so!" the other laughed. "But I shan't come again."

"Wait till we are asked," the Duchess advised.

Elizabeth stood at the casement fondling her rose idly. "What shall I do with it?" she asked Feng Me-lah, as she turned to follow her aunt and the captive New York woman.

"Hold it and smell it," Miss Feng answered. "She did not say that you might wear it. She gave it to you to smell and to admire. Put it in your left hand, Ee-lis-bet. You ought not have take it in your right hand."

Elizabeth laughed and obeyed.

"Hold it in front of you, the very honorable rose that our Holy Mother condescended to give."

"Must I carry it that way all day?" the English girl giggled.

"For always," Feng Me-lah answered gravely. "While you are here," she added.

"When it is wilted and limp? It is getting warmer already."

"The flower Her Majesty has held in her hand will not fade soon," Feng Me-lah told her.

"Breakfast" was so surprising and so palatable that it almost mollified Mrs. Van Vleck. She asked innumerable questions as she ate, and fortunately Miss Feng could answer all of them. "I can cook it myself," she boasted more than once. And if she had not known that Feng Yu was several times a millionaire, Mrs. Van Vleck would have said instantly, "Come along to New York with me and cook it there." But if Hilda Van Vleck accorded the Empress Dowager of China no social precedence above herself, she had all

the millionaire's reverence for wealth, and she forbore offering Miss Feng a cook's situation on Fifth Avenue, although she secretly thought it a much better job than being a maid to T'zū Hsi.

The Old Buddha did not stroll with them in the gardens or go with them on the lake. But she joined them at the theatricals that ended their day in the Summer Palace.

And she gave each of them a parting gift.

Before the theater Feng Me-lah showed them all they could see of the amazing place in so short a time—showed them very much more than they could hope to remember.

They saw the Throne Room—T'zū Hsi had commanded it. They saw her dancing-fish and her favorite tea-house. They saw a roomful of her jewels and silks, but not her friendship-wall. They saw her marble boat and one of her collections of clocks. They saw where her gourds grew and where her pet monkeys slept. They saw her library and where her perfumes were made. They were presented to the Son of Heaven's Secondary Wife and to two of his concubines. And they drank tea where often the Old Buddha drank hers.

T'zū Hsi dismissed them with grave queenly sweetness.

Her attendants gathered behind her were aghast when she laid her hand lightly on Elizabeth Kent's, and she spoke so low that only Feng Me-lah standing close to interpret caught the laughing words.

Why had she touched the barbarian girl? What had she said to her? A Chinese Empress does not touch even her own women of high rank. Would Feng Me-lah tell them what Her Majesty had said?

"I'd like to very much, Ma'am," the English girl said clearly and curtsied low.

"You said truth-words, saucy minx-one," they heard the Old Buddha say to Feng Me-lah when the pavilion door closed upon the Western guests.

Then, "Bid Tsai Ying come to me at the Hour-of-the-Cock," T'zũ Hsi commanded as she went from them. But she stood a moment at the open casement as she passed it. A bird was singing up in a maiden-hair tree.

Only Feng Me-lah saw T'zũ Hsi's lip quiver a little. And Feng Me-lah heard T'zũ Hsi sigh.

CHAPTER XXVI

AT midnight T'zũ Hsi gave Kang Yi the order he had worked for—schemed and hoped for for years.

There were tears in her eyes, but her mouth was set firm.

A nightingale burst into glorious, melting song. The breath of the night-flowers flooded the Palace room.

Out in the millet half-naked men were girding their loins, counting their longevity pills.

At midnight Mrs. Van Vleck still was talking hard.

"—and I just wish you could have seen her clothes; they looked plain enough till you looked at them hard, and then you saw that they'd cost a small fortune. Jack! those eunuchs! They wear head-dresses that would make you scream. They don't walk, they wad-

dle—they're so fat. Did you know that eunuchs were fat and wore head-dresses?"

John Thorn shook his head and stuffed his pipe fiercely. He wished Aunt Hilda would change the subject—at least shift it a bit. He didn't relish the eunuchs, and she had described the face and attire of Li Lien-ying minutely four, if not five, times already.

"I just wish I could get hold of her cook. I never tasted such food in my life. They have it like that every day; Miss Feng says so. I'd give half my diamonds to be able to take the Empress' cook back to New York with me. There were buckets of champagne, John. I guess they think we just about live on champagne. None of them touched it, I noticed. It must have been got in for us. But it was downright rude of her not to sit at the table with us. Joan didn't seem to mind a mite. I did; I minded a lot. I never felt so insulted in my life. Me not good enough to sit down at table with an old Chinese woman—and she no better than she ought to be, if one quarter they say about her is one quarter true!"

"Well perhaps that's why—knew she wasn't good enough to eat with you," the nephew suggested conciliatingly.

"Rubbish! Not a bit of it. She thinks she's It, if ever a woman did. She's got the grand manner down fine. And they all play up to her. My! Why, even Joan did. Jo called her 'Your Majesty' or 'Ma'am' every time she opened her mouth to her."

"Didn't you?" John grinned.

"Not on your life! Catch me! But I've a notion the Feng girl did when she translated me."

Thorn thought it highly probable.

"Why, if Queen Victoria or the Pope of Rome had invited me to dinner they'd have had theirs with me!"

"I rather doubt if the Pope would," Thorn laughed. "And perhaps old what-you-may-call-her always eats alone. She's got no end of fancy notions, according to all accounts."

"Oh—she's got fancy notions all right. Miss Feng did say that she always has her dinner by herself; but that was just an excuse, I know."

"Perhaps she doesn't eat at all," John insinuated soothingly.

"She doesn't look as if she ate too much," the aunt owned, sighing a little with a half grimace down at her own plump person, "and that's more than they'd be able to say of me if I had that sort of stuff to eat every day. It was the very best food I ever have tasted. And the dishes we ate off of! I just itched to bring away the lot!"

"I hope I get you back home before you get your head chopped off," Thorn said severely.

A great deal that, without wishing to gather anything, he had gathered here began to convince John Thorn that old China had had a darned rotten deal from the English and from other races, his own included, and was getting it still. He had a shrewd suspicion that there'd be a hell of a bust-up one of these days, and that it wouldn't be altogether old China's fault either. The big things between China and her various exploiters his mind had not grappled with, had paid them little attention. But he saw little indecencies of personal dishonorableness and discourtesy to individual Chinese almost every day, and they rasped him. Peking—and the Fengs—had done that to John Thorn! China wasn't a patch to the U. S. A., Peking was unimportant to him compared to Chicago; but he had had to revise his pre-estimate of the Chinese considerably, because he was observant (even

when indifferent), not unintelligent and had common-sense. He knew the value of little things, and knew their incalculable dangerousness; every sound business man does. If the petty insolences he constantly saw inflicted here annoyed him, affronted his manly sense of fairness, what must they do to the Chinese! How long were the Chinese going to swallow them? he began to wonder. And what did the educated, well-born Chinese *think* of them?

At midnight the Duchess left the letter she was writing her husband to be finished to-morrow. She was sleepy, after a long interesting day.

"I hope she may invite us again, but I doubt it," she had written. "I think it was a passing whim that led her to have us the once, unless she did it to please Miss Feng—the Manchu girl I have written you all about. The Empress is genuinely fond of her. But we did not interest her in the least, not unless Elizabeth did. Something about Elizabeth amused the Empress. She looked at Elizabeth searchingly all the time, and every time she did her eyes twinkled. She has wonderful eyes. She is a lady, Bill, and every inch a Queen. I am glad I have seen her. A very dangerous woman, I should think, and one who will go her own way as long as she lives; with the brain of our Queen Elizabeth, the witchery of Ninon de l'Enclos, the charm of Ellen Terry's Beatrice—and a great deal that I couldn't get at all. I couldn't read her. She didn't trouble to read us; we did not interest the Empress Dowager. Elizabeth did in a way, as I have told you; but I thought it was surface interest. I did not think that she tried to read Elizabeth, for all she looked at her so much. I think it was Elizabeth's face that she was interested in—and that amused her so. Though I cannot imagine what it was she saw to

laugh at; Elizabeth was looking her best, quite pretty. She said she hoped to see Elizabeth again. So, she may be invited again. We shall see. But I don't believe that Hilda and I shall."

Elizabeth Kent was fast asleep at midnight. She had brought the rose T'zū Hsi had given her all the way back to the hotel carefully enough. But she had forgotten to put it in water, and she had not troubled to press it in a book. That was rather a pity. It would have been an interesting memento. The rose was fading, dying thirstily on the English girl's dressing-table.

CHAPTER XXVII

THORN wondered what Hill was doing there when she passed him hurriedly on Pewter Lane. But he had no mind to ask her, and he did not care. He never had liked the Duchess' English maid. She had gone out of her way to be almost rude to him once or twice behind her mistress' back. Hill liked Americans as little as Mr. Thorn liked most English. Also, the woman was miserable here in China. The white servant very rarely fits in either comfortably or satisfactorily in Asia. Old Anglo residents in the East usually, and wisely, content themselves with native servitors. But the Duchess always took Hill with her everywhere, and without the least concern of how it suited Hill or anyone else except her ducal self. This time it had suited the maid very badly; she hated China, and she very much disliked having to maid Miss Kent as well as her own lady. One does not pick up a duchess every day, even

in the highest servant circles, and Anne Hill had no intention of giving notice or of incurring it. But she did not intend to mix herself up with foreigners, Chinese or American, any more than she had to, and she mended Miss Kent's garments with an embittered soul and liked still less having to follow close at Elizabeth's heel whenever that unsociable young lady chose to wander about by herself. Elizabeth had done that more than once lately; oftener than her aunt realized. Hill had not dared to mention it to her mistress; the Duchess was not that sort of employer of domestic service. Still less had Hill dared not to obey the Duchess' clear order to go with Miss Kent at any time that the niece started off otherwise unaccompanied, if only from one Legation compound to another.

John Thorn had come out by himself for a stroll, because he had nothing else to do and had felt cooped up and bored in the *Hôtel de Pékin*. He was wandering about aimlessly and half wishing he had gone to the English Club and hunted up Ridley and Norton—they were good for a game of poker almost any time. He had come out for a mouthful of fresh air, but there wasn't any. He'd been a fool to think there might be. There was nothing but dust and intolerable heat and thick human smells that were worse than both. Any fellow who came out for a walk in Peking was an ass. There was nothing to walk on unless you liked to walk on ruts and into ditches, not unless you climbed up onto the Wall. He'd had about all the Wall he wanted already. Lord, he was tired of all this. All very fine for Aunt Hilda here, if that was the way she liked it. But he hadn't found any long-lost love in Peking, or anything else he much wanted.

A courtyard door caught his eye because it was open. Courtyards kept their doors shut as a rule. There

were trees in there. He could see one. There didn't seem to be anyone about. He'd have a look. If the family was at home and indicated that they were not delighted to see him, he'd clear out. There was no harm in taking a squint at a place that stood wide open like that; probably no one lived there at all.

Thorn pushed in a trifle cautiously, peered about, and saw nothing but weed-grown flagstones between two low poor-class dwellings that were shut and looked untenanted. There was no sign of human life.

Hello, though—what was that crouched down against the old nut tree over there across that inner courtyard beyond a moon-shaped archway? A woman? Thorn went a little nearer.

It was Elizabeth Kent, and she was crying!

Thorn's first impulse was to get away before she saw him or knew that he had seen her. A girl in tears probably appalled him less than it does the average Englishman. Not that the American man is the less soft-hearted; far from it! But he is much more used to seeing open feminine emotion. But no man who is manly cares to see a woman weep if he can avoid it. And Thorn knew how this girl would hate to have him see her cry, how angrily she would resent it.

And he turned to go.

But, hang it all, he couldn't leave her alone here in this outlandish place. He'd have to hang about until the old cat of a maid came back, no matter how little he liked it, or how little Elizabeth Kent did.

Should he try to keep his being here from her, or should he go right up to her and see if he could help her? It seemed jolly mean to stay without letting her know, a sort of spying. And she'd be as mad as thun-

der if she found out that he was here and had seen her crying. Poor little soul; it must be something really bad that made Elizabeth Kent feel like that. She was the last girl in the world to go to pieces over nothing. Somehow Thorn was sure of that.

He wanted to help her. She had been a brick the morning he had brought Me-lah Feng back to that blooming temple—much nicer to them both than the aunts had been. She wasn't a bad sort when a fellow came to know her. They had been heaps better friends since then; at least he had.

Gosh! how the girl was crying!

John Thorn took the courtyard in three strides.

"Look here, you mustn't do that!" he said bending over the English girl concernedly.

The English girl sat bolt upright and stared at him angrily through long wet lashes. Then she gave him a little disgusted wintry smile and mopped fiercely at her drowned eyes.

"I *am* silly!" she told him scornfully.

The man was relieved, and not ungrateful, to see how little unfriendly was the damp, rueful look she gave him. The poor little thing looked ashamed, but she didn't look a bit angry.

"Tell us about it," John suggested gently, "and let's fix it up. Most things can be, if you tackle them hard and the right way."

"This one can't," Elizabeth murmured.

"Rubbish! You just give me a go at it, and then see!" Mr. Thorn was warming to his work of knight-errantry—she *had* been nice to him and to Me-lah Feng that pesky time. He leaned across the sprawled trunk and patted Miss Kent's hand where it lay on her knee as she still sat crouched up against the walnut tree. "Look out!" Elizabeth warned him a trifle un-

steadily, but the gray eyes sparkled through their salt mist, "you'll get your fingers wet."

"So I have, soaked! That's a silly sort of handkerchief!" he drew the sodden lump of tissue from under her fingers and spread it out carefully on his *topée* on the ground.

"And I am a sillier sort of girl," Elizabeth pronounced disgustedly.

"Perhaps; perhaps not. Here, have this one."

She had not jerked her hand from under his. She laughed at him amiably while he dried her fingers on his own sturdy handkerchief and then pretended to dry his own fingers very carefully.

"No," as he held it out to her, "I don't want your handkerchief, Mr. Thorn—but thanks all the same. I am not going to cry again. Not for years and years."

"Tell us about it."

Elizabeth scarcely had realized that she liked this American rather better than she had at first. She thought very little about him except when she actually saw him, or when some insistent or placative words of her aunt's reminded her of him. But his unconscious, slowly growing friendliness had made for some slight growth in her friendliness for him; so too had other things. And recently Elizabeth Kent had learned a surprising thing that was greatly to John Thorn's credit. Feng Yu had told her, in sworn confidence, as a delicious joke. She had thought it not a joke, though foolish and unnecessary, but something rather splendid.

"Come on, tell me," the man persisted.

Elizabeth shook her head. "You wouldn't think it was anything. You couldn't understand. You can't help me, Mr. Thorn; no one can."

"Try me."

"Thanks; but no." The girl spoke resolutely and began at once to tell this comparative stranger, whom she had disliked from the first, what she never before had spoken of to any one except a Manchu girl one day in Feng Yu's garden. And she told John Thorn more than she had told Feng Me-lah; told him it more fully.

Why?

Goodness knows!

It is just so that often our most vital confidences are given.

Perhaps we are less ashamed to bare our weakness, our lack, need, dilemma, to someone for whose personal opinion we do not much care. Perhaps the almost stranger whom we shall not see again, or often see again, is the less disturbing recipient of our self-revelation. Perhaps impulse is all of it. Or it may be that the readiness that is all catches us in odd or alien company, yet will not be dammed up or denied, and we take the great human relief of telling the thing we were determined never to tell.

Sitting in a Peking courtyard, hunched up against a hoary old walnut tree, Elizabeth told John Thorn.

Intending to say just a few unimportant words of it before she changed the subject, she began—and told it all.

Woman-like she began it with a question.

"Have you ever loved anything very much?"

John Thorn threw her a half suspicious look. Luckily (for future amity between them) Elizabeth did not catch it. Her eyes were dark on the moon-shaped arch of a house door. Then Thorn cursed himself for the ass he was. Miss Kent was not trying to flirt with him at last. The funny girl was not even thinking of him.

"Hm'm," he considered her very leading question. "I'm not sure. I like my work more than a little—when I'm let stay at home and do it. I think a lot of Aunt Hilda—especially when she does not hook me into fool world-trots. I don't believe that either of those two best likings of mine are exactly what you mean by 'love.' "

Quietly as she had spoken, Elizabeth Kent had said "love" as if it meant a big thing.

For a moment or two she said no more, and John waiting for her to go on, wondered if he ever would "love" anyone the way she meant; wondered how the experience would feel, and how it would pan out if he ever did.

"I have—loved something very much," the low, deep voice went on presently. "And I am never to have it again. That is what upset me so. I got to thinking about it waiting here all alone for Hill to come back. I don't think I can stand it," she ended bitterly. Thorn thought she was going to cry again. Well, let her cry, if it helped her. And he was going to hear about that love affair of hers that his aunt had found out all about without being told. Aunt Hilda was as sharp as you made 'em. Lots of women were. He was going to hear all about Mr. Hugh Lester now, why they wouldn't let her marry him, and why they ought to.

Well, he was on their side every time; on Elizabeth's and Hugh's. John Thorn didn't see how he could help this pair of English lovers any; but he certainly would like to. Probably Hugh was poor, and Elizabeth's sordid, stiff-necked, toff relations sniffed at him for that.

Elizabeth was not going to cry again. That was the last thing she was going to do.

"I don't suppose you have ever loved a place very much in your life. All the Americans I meet seem to adore being Americans, but I don't think they love America the way we love England. I think that perhaps your country is too big to love, to love in the same way we love our little island one. I think it is the little things that get most love."

The man glanced down oddly at the girl's almost tiny figure. But she was not fishing. Probably Hugh was a pigmy. If Miss Kent liked him that way, it was all right.

"Have you ever loved a home of yours so much that having to live somewhere else was maddening?"

"No," John Thorn confessed. He did not remember his own mother, and very nearly all of his life had been spent in hotels.

"I do not believe that men often do—not many men," Elizabeth said kindly.

Thorn wondered. And all of a sudden it occurred to him that just possibly *he* might; the right home, with the right girl in it. Hotels had their drawbacks, although this was the first time he had thought so. And he had not met the right girl yet. Why didn't she get to Hugh? Not moon on about England and America and a few other irrelevancies? Was it her roundabout girl-way of saying that her beloved was an Englishman? Of course he was! Any fool would know that much. Elizabeth Kent never would understand or half appreciate a man who wasn't an Englishman. She was more friendly with Lee Wong than was strictly necessary now and then.

"The Beeches is going to be sold, I think. And there is nothing I can do to keep it."

"The Beeches?"

"Our home in Surrey. Oh, it is such a dear place. And it is my home. I was born there. We all were born there—Geof and Harry and Margaret, my married sister, and little Dick who died when he was a baby. We used to have such good times there. I love every stone of The Beeches, every tree. When I go to bed I always pray that I may dream of it, be at The Beeches in my sleep. But it is horrid to wake up in the morning, way off here in China, and know that I never shall go back to it again—except in my sleep. I simply could not go there, not even go past it, when strangers were living in it, even if they'd let me. And I can't stop its being sold. None of the others want to live there. Margaret is married and Gerald, her husband, is in the Diplomatic Service. They always are out of England. Both the boys are in the Army. There isn't one of us that could afford to live there, or to own it and shut it up. I could stand it, if I could own it for my very own and just shut it up—or live in one of the cottages and unlock a door and go into the old rooms now and again. I'd rather own one of the beech trees at home than own all China. It isn't any sort of a show place, just an old, rambling, gray, stone house in a dear old garden, with a meadow and a wood of beech trees and a small orchard. But it is my home! I'd rather have it burned to the ground than have other people live in it."

John Thorn could not altogether understand what this girl felt, but he heard and felt the passion in her voice.

"Why sell it then? Can't you keep it between you?"

"No one wants to but me. I begged to once. It was no use, of course. I have not mentioned it

again. I shan't again. I've just got to bear it, and I don't know how to. Even if the others wanted to, there isn't enough money. The boys can't live on their pay, you know."

Thorn neither knew nor approved. In his creed a man ought to live on his pay. But he didn't interrupt Elizabeth to say so. He hoped she'd get to Hugh before too long. They ought to get back to the hotel presently, with or without Hill. Wherever had Elizabeth sent her anyway? He'd heard a queer ominous sound off there behind the house of Wen Lien a few moments ago. Thunder? It looked a lovely day still.

"Father's pension died with him, and most of Mother's income did when she did. We four could only just about pay rates and taxes and keep The Beeches in decent repair, without living there, if we lived on bread and dripping."

Thorn wondered what dripping was. He did not ask. He wondered what the old place, that the girl loved so, was worth anyway.

"Won't the Duchess give it to you for a wedding present?" he ventured, feeling the suggestion feeble as he made it. No matter how small the money value of The Beeches might be, it seemed improbable that the Duchess of Charnley would be inclined to give it to Elizabeth on Elizabeth's marriage to a man to whom the aunt had objected so strongly that to prevent that very marriage she had brought the niece all the way from England to China.

"Whose wedding present?"

"Yours."

"It takes two to commit matrimony," the girl reminded him. She seemed genuinely amused. "Who is the other one?"

"Why—Mr. Lester," Thorn blundered, suddenly embarrassed.

Elizabeth Kent gazed at Thorn in unmistakable amazement, and then she began to laugh, laughing at him as disconcertingly as Feng Yu had. Then Thorn saw her wince as if in pain, and shift herself uneasily as she sat leaning against the walnut's wrinkled trunk.

"Do you mean Hugh Lester?"

"Sure."

Elizabeth bubbled over with mirth—and John Thorn could not think it affected.

"Wherever did you get hold of Hugh's name, I wonder. I marry Hugh Lester! I'd like to know what put that perfectly mad idea in your head. It's too absurd for words. I would as soon marry you!"

"Thanks," John said tersely. That preposterous suggestion made him tingle angrily all over. And it made him even angrier to know that his face was flaming. He could have shaken Elizabeth Kent, shaken her hard, and enjoyed doing it. The vixen!

Aunt Hilda had made a proper fool of him this time. It served him right for listening to any woman's gossip. Marry him! He'd not attempt to play the god in the car to any girl's love affair again. Not an English girl's.

The Duchess was fooled too! That was something.

"*When* is Hill coming back?" the man demanded.

"She ought to have been here long ago. I sent her ages ago now."

"Hadn't we better make tracks for the hotel without her?"

"You'd better," Elizabeth agreed promptly. "I can't go until she brings a chair or a cart. I have ricked my ankle, if I haven't sprained it."

CHAPTER XXVIII

“**A**ND you never told me! You are in pain, and you never said so, but let me go on boring you, when I ought to have been doing something!” Thorn’s vexation had vanished at the first hint that she was hurt.

“But you have not bored me, Mr. Thorn. I forgot all about my silly foot thinking of The Beeches. And it helped me to say what I have been bottling up ever since Father died. Thank you for letting me talk to you about The Beeches. And thank you for the jolliest laugh I have had for years.” Elizabeth’s face twitched again, with fun not with pain.

“Look here, I must get you out of this or fetch a doctor. I can’t do that though without leaving you. That’s out of the question. I don’t suppose there is any sort of white doctor nearer than Legation Street. I’ll find a Chink to send though. You poor little kid! Say, I’d better have a look first of all.”

“At what?”

“Your foot, of course. I know a bit about sprains. I won’t hurt you a mite.”

Miss Kent twitched her short skirt a little nearer her foot. “Oh, never mind it now, but thank you all the same. It doesn’t hurt much. I’ll just leave it until I get home.”

“I’ll send. Don’t you worry. I am not going to leave you.”

“I know that,” Elizabeth told him.

“I’m going to that gate there, no farther than you can see me, to sing out to some Chink I see on the street, and make him trot off chop-chop for some sort of trap or a litter.” He meant to send for a doctor

as well, and he meant to get that shoe and stocking off, as soon as he had caught and sent a messenger. Probably the hurt ankle needed immediate attention.

As he reached the outer door of the courtyard that opened on the street, ugly sounds met him. There was human pandemonium on the narrow lane that had been silent and deserted half an hour ago. Women were shrieking, men were rioting, a gun sounded in the nearer distance, a nearer gun answered it. There was bloodshed and human welter out there. Thorn turned back a step to reassure Elizabeth, if he could, before he managed, as he must, to detach one of those demented coolies from the seething street-row and bribe and make him do the errand. Bribery would do anything in China. It would do a lot in most places.

As Thorn turned towards Elizabeth, a blood-stained Chinese man, and two disheveled coolie women dashed in from the street, clanked the door after them, and hurriedly pulled down the strong bar that fastened it on the inside.

The bleeding man was fully armed; Thorn was not. One of the women had a knife in her sinewy hand; the other had dragged in with her a great spiked boat-pole.

They were prisoners in a low-down courtyard, in one of Peking's meanest quarters.

"I'm afraid there is hell to pay, but don't you worry. I'll take care of you," John Thorn told Elizabeth as he went back to her, not a little relieved that the three Chinese made no effort to prevent him. "These street shindies over here never last above ten minutes. Don't you fret."

Elizabeth smiled up at him with a friendly nod.

"You blessed, plucky kid you," was what John Thorn called her—strictly to himself.

There was hell to pay! Thorn had not exagger-

ated in saying that. Hell was being paid out on the Chinese street. Probably there would be hell to pay in here where they were, before many minutes.

God! he'd kill twenty of them before they touched her!

The older coolie woman was busy with the injured man, binding his head with strips she wrenched off from her own coarse clothing. Her own hands were bleeding. When she had bandaged him, she opened a door and led him into one of the rooms that opened on to the outer courtyard.

There was only one Chinese woman—the one who had the heavy, iron-hooked boat-pole—left for him to deal with for the moment, Thorn watching them reflected. That was easy. One China girl plus a stick of wood against an American man who never had been scared in his life; unless it scared him now to think what might be going to happen to a little English girl.

Still dragging the boat-hook with her, the younger Chinese woman came to the inner courtyard's open moon-shaped gate, and stood there scowling at the two White intruders.

"Wa! Wa!" she spat at them, clutching her pole threateningly, Thorn thought. She added another word that John Thorn recognized. That was what the Hakka had muttered at the temple the day he and Feng Me-lah had gone back there at dusk. Thorn did not know what it meant, if it had any English meaning; but he knew it was one of the most opprobrious, uncleanest and unkindest terms of abuse in Chinese: common to many of the Chinese languages, degrading to hear, unspeakable to think. Perhaps Elizabeth knew so, too, for he saw her flush.

But the woman came no nearer to them, she turned away, hissing imprecations at them over her shoulder.

Then with a sudden lurch of strong young body and powerful arms she threw the two halves of the moon-shaped door together, and they heard the great bar fall on its other side.

They were prisoners indeed. In China!

And China sounded aflame.

Gongs bleated maddeningly. Horns shrieked; brazen horns and shrill-voiced women. Through two shut and bolted courtyards they could hear men groaning out on the street, and little Chinese children sobbing. A dog squealed—from the agony of a spear-thrust, Elizabeth believed.

A battery belched. John Thorn believed it near the Legations. Flames leapt up and stained the sky.

It was growing dark now.

A thousand feet sounded running along the cobbled street.

The man smelt the acrid stench of burning flesh, and prayed that the girl there beside him might not know it for what it was.

Guns noised near and far.

"It sounds like battle," Elizabeth said calmly.

John Thorn bent his face a little to look at hers more closely. Was it possible that any girl could be as brave as this girl seemed?

Perhaps Elizabeth Kent read—and understood—the question in his eyes. For she answered it.

"I am not frightened, Mr. Thorn."

And John Thorn believed her. He had to believe her.

"I am then," he muttered fiercely. "I am darned frightened—for you."

Elizabeth gave him a little friendly smile.

John threw himself down on the ground beside her. "Every bit as cheap as standing," he asserted. But

his eyes were alert on the closed courtyard door.

"You are the best yet!" he told her in a voice that almost broke; he leaned over her and laid his hand on hers. The little hand was steady, and he felt it warm.

She did not draw her hand away. "We can't be enemies again, can we, Mr. Thorn?" and she asked it with a gentle laugh.

"I guess not!" the man said hotly, and his hand lay a little heavier on hers. And still Elizabeth did not draw her hand away.

Shrieks came nearer, thicker, then thinned in the distance.

There was sound of firing from twenty quarters. The air belched thunder. Curtains of quivering, bellying red hung in the night sky, shutting them in in flame. For the sudden night had come.

"What about your foot? Shan't I see—do it up in my handkerchief perhaps? Is it swelling much?" It seemed to the American no small part of the troubled present that that slim ankle probably was throbbing, hurting more and more. If Peking was burning to ashes, he could not help it; but he might help that little foot's pain—and he very much wanted to.

"Oh, my foot! We'll leave it alone—leave well-enough alone, until we get out of this—if we do."

"Of course, we'll get out of it," Thorn promised.

"We may," Elizabeth answered. "Oh," she added presently, speaking more vehemently than she had yet, "I wish you had not found me. You would have been back with the others by now. If only I hadn't kept you here—with all my selfish chatter—about The Beeches—and other things!"

"And you'd have been here all alone through this! Thank God I did find you." He took his hand from

hers and fumbled in his coat with fingers that trembled.

"Smoke?" he asked when he had found his case.

"Won't I! We'll smoke our peace-pipe."

"Calumet!" John Thorn told her as he struck a match and held it carefully.

"That is a pretty word. I like it. What does it mean?" Elizabeth demanded as she drew the first comforting whiff.

Thorn told her, after he frugally had hoarded the tiny match flare for his own cigarette; neither tobacco nor sulphur should be squandered to-night.

"It's a dandy word, I've always thought," he began. "Lots of the old Indian words are. Pity we haven't kept more of them for our streets and rivers and cities. New this and New the other are weak, imitation names for American places that we Americans have made. We have kept, out West, a lot of the names the Indians left behind them when we chased them off to the sunset. Calumet means peace-pipe. The redskins used to smoke their long-stemmed calumets together in celebration of peace, and in pledge that they'd stand by each other to the last gasp. You couldn't turn on the other chap or fail him to the death, when once you'd smoked your calumets together. We've a Calumet in Chicago, a street up against the Lake. Quite a lot of our Chicago streets have Indian names."

"Tell me about Chicago," Elizabeth suggested.

Under happier circumstances no theme could have come nearer to inspiring John Thorn. He knew his Chicago. Perhaps he unconsciously loved it in his own totally different way almost as much as Elizabeth Kent loved the old gabled gray house that rambled among its beech trees and lilacs in Surrey. But Thorn was hideously frightened, and it was not easy to talk glibly to a hellish accompaniment of shrieks, guns and death

groans. But he talked on heroically. It was heroism! Elizabeth Kent knew it for that. She knew that he was talking to keep her from thinking—as far as he could. And the girl's courage leapt to his. She was grateful. And she prompted him with questions—because she was grateful.

He told her all he could think of to tell her about Chicago, about Illinois, the Great Lakes. He raked his memory for old Indian stories. And when his memory failed him he invented a few. They were not very able stories, not very well told. But they were brave! And the English girl played up to him with an aching heart and a torturing ankle.

Neither was thinking of the other as much as they were thinking of the women they had left a few hours ago in the *Hôtel de Pékin*. Were they safe? Was this a terrible local broil, or was it the whole capital's holocaust? Was Japan bombarding Peking? Elizabeth wondered. What did Aunt Joan think had become of her? Where was Hill? Had Hill got back to Legation Street? Was this going to last? Would it last much longer?

"Have you ever seen a wigwam, Mr. Thorn?"

"Heaps, out West. We don't grow them in Illinois any longer."

"Just what are they like?"

Thorn described them, elaborately, if not very accurately. The trees of the Mariposa came next, the Yellowstone Park led to Salt Lake City.

Was Aunt Hilda dead with fright? When could he get to her? There wasn't a kind thing she ever had done or said to him (and both had been countless) that John Thorn did not think of as he sat trying to cheer Miss Kent a little with quiet talk of far-away

things. He'd give the rest of his life and the city of Chicago thrown in to be with Aunt Hilda through this. The man knew now that this was no street broil. This was war—revolution or invasion.

There were patches of quiet that made the hideous recurrent pandemonium noises the more hideous. What was going to be the upshot? At the *Hôtel de Pékin*? Here? Did the hotel stand? Was there a Legation Quarter? And this girl shut up with him here, rats in a Chinese trap, alone, defenseless, a small-sized penknife his only weapon! Could he kill her with a penknife, if it came to that? His own hands——

Shrieks of human torture, shrieks and hiss of gunfire, the horrid pat-patter of bullets grew louder, came closer. Flames rose higher and higher in the bleeding dark.

Thorn talked on.

He talked through the silent patches, and talked when the noise smothered his words and curdled his blood.

A hell-blast more terrible than all that had gone before rose in a scream, fell in blistered moans. Did the walls of Peking still stand, a stone remain on the Temple of Heaven, a bridge, or a pagoda in all Peking?

Thorn felt the girl's body give towards his a little; Elizabeth was asleep.

He put her away from him cautiously, while he ripped off his coat, wrapped it about her—the dear, plucky little girl—wrapped it about the slender girl very carefully before he drew her into the crook of his arm, into the added warmth of his nearness. The courtyard grew chill.

This old gray flannel coat of his would have a tall tale to tell of the girls that had worn it, if it ever got back to Chicago!

The guns shrieked and spit over there near the Legations.

Elizabeth slept.

Elizabeth cuddled her sleep-heavy head against John Thorn's coatless breast.

John Thorn did not sleep.

Hell belched over Peking.

CHAPTER XXIX

LADYSMITH, Spion Kop, Tugela! England had little thought of a handful of Englishmen—and women and little children—insecurely housed, unguarded, close against the Tartar Wall of Peking. Ladysmith was relieved, London breathed again. Mafeking night! She drank to her heroes and danced to them. And drank on in a reeling debauch of relief—a mad, spiritual forerunner and prescience of the ultimate victory which comes to nations as well as to individuals who muddle through to it long enough and hard enough. Kitchener was there—and Roberts. England would win.

And the Harmonious Fists were gathering thick in Peking. A Kansu soldier jostled too close to an English lady on Haymarket Street. It might have been accidental—or rice-wine. But the Mohammedans do not touch wine! But Haymarket Street and Square Handkerchief Lane grew increasingly unpleasant for English ladies to saunter in. The Boxer writing grew large on the Tartar Wall. Could no one read on Le-

gation Street? Did no one care in Whitehall? Well—Whitehall had a war on, a real and not unimportant war in South Africa; and it had arrived, was well under way. A war that may come never looms large in the British mind. Give England a war really arrived, an indisputably going affair in the war line, and England is there every time. She can fight. England is no craven, and when once the guns begin to play she is no sluggard. Her endurance is godlike. She has little stomach for retreat. Surrender she won't. She hasn't since Yorktown. She does not lack vision (though it is said) but she does lack prevision. And she pays the price of her lack. She pays it like a giant-hero, with an ugly oath and quick double fists. And almost always she pays it like the little island gentleman she is, with a shrug, unaffected *sang-froid*, patience, persistence, everlasting pluck. Her men fight on to the last drop of red in their veins, and their women are glad that they should; their women and children take it as the matter of course that it is. But the lives and the hearts that could be saved, if only England were not too proud (and Whitehall too political) to get ready!

Some day she may muddle on too long in China. She came near it in 1900. Still she did have a war on.

But what of Washington, of Paris, of Rome? Berlin was busy watching Oom Paul and hoping he'd throttle his foes. Perhaps Amsterdam was, too. But Washington and the other seven of the eleven Powers legationed within a stone's throw of Peking's painted wooden cannons had shamefully less excuse. Was Japan willing that the Boxer crash should come when it did? Did Japan think it worth while? And why should Spain be flurried when Washington and London were not?

Well—it is a far cry from Washington to Peking, from the Thames to the Bay of Pechili.* There were only a handful of Western men—and women and little children—in Peking. If anything happened to them (of course, nothing would) they would be avenged—afterwards—if doing it cost every yellow life in China, every grain of rice and of wheat, every ivory and jade—or England and America would know the reason why.

What were the men and women in Legation Street thinking of? (The little white children could not be expected to read the writing on the Tartar Wall.) The women trusted their men, and there were the British Birthday celebrations on May 24 to think of, evening dresses to be overhauled, dance programs to be filled. And the men had the Boer War to discuss at the “Ice-house.” The Rev. Samuel Simons said sadly that the Legation Club might as appropriately be called the “Whiskey-and-soda-house.”

The Boer War kept going, and Legation Street drifted on.

Early in June Legation Street woke up—too late.

And in her horror at the hideousness the morning papers described London all but forgot her South African War.

A great cry went up from all London. England's heart stood still. The Indian Mutiny was remembered in London that night. Cawnpore and Dehli seemed nearer than Ladysmith and Tugela. We did have soldiers and generals in South Africa. How many men and officers could be spared from the Chinese treaty-ports and from our ships afloat near them? Enough to be of any use, if they could get through in

time? And could they even hope to get through?

The horror and danger that spat into the imprisoned Legations from the maddened Boxer hordes without were little worse than the dissensions within the hastily erected barricades. It could not be a happy Western family, but it was discredibly not a united one. Not all of them showed up well in their eight weeks' ordeal. Not all who lived through it and still live can recall it with entire self-approval.

The Duchess and Mrs. Van Vleck were both writing letters in their common sitting-room when Lord Arthur Ridley burst in on them unannounced.

The Duchess raised her eyebrows slightly. She was a social stickler. But she was more surprised than annoyed, for Arthur Ridley was a stickler too.

Lord Arthur made no apology whatever.

"The Chief has sent me to take you to him at once," he said crisply, "all four of you, and your maid, of course."

"Indeed," the Duchess returned coldly. "Are we under arrest, may I ask?"

"No—in the soup. We all are. The Boxers are up and doing. They are pouring into Peking in—well, a good many of them, and they are up and at *us* hard. We are barricading ourselves in as strongly and quickly as we can. We've sent for more forces, of course, from Tientsin, from the other treaty-ports and from our ships at the coast—as many as can be spared. We've got to jolly well hold our own little fort until they get here, and build it as well while we hold it. I can give you just ten minutes to get ready anything you must bring with you. I've more sheep to gather into the fold, after I have handed you over, including a few damned missionaries, if I can find them. And I must not be cut off; the Chief wants *me*.

He can't spare one able-bodied. Tell your maid to look sharp. Can Thorn shoot, Mrs. Van Vleck?"

"He can," she said quietly, and did not trouble to add, "canvasback ducks, not Indians." She had risen as soon as the gist of Ridley's first words had found her and had begun to sort and gather in a businesslike way.

The Duchess was trembling. The writing-pad had fallen from her knee. What would Bill do, if anything happened to her? And even if nothing did, he'd be frightened to death, when he heard that something might have happened. He'd gone white and been no use at all when she'd broken her leg that time out hunting. He had cried when Mary was born. Her poor Bill! She had had no business to leave him, poor dear. She'd better have let Elizabeth marry six Hugh Lesters.

Ridley went to the bell and rang it sharply.

A hotel-boy answered it promptly. His face was impassive, his manner was respectful, amiable even. The *Hôtel de Pékin* was not out of hand yet.

Mrs. Van Vleck went on gathering up papers and valuables while they waited for Elizabeth and Thorn and Hill to come. And the Duchess began to cry softly. Lord Arthur went to the window and looked through it anxiously.

He had not expected the Duchess to go to pieces like that; he had not expected the American woman to take it so well. She hadn't grasped it, and the other had. Mrs. Van Vleck would begin to do so when they got out into the street, probably. She certainly would when she heard the bullets patter against the Legations' walls! What use did she think her cheque-book and letters of credit would be in there in their probable deathtrap? Just like an American! And rather like

any woman! How much longer was that Chink going to be!

Loon Got had been no time at all, and he stood in the door.

"No can get. All gone out."

"Out—Elizabeth out?" the Duchess cried.

Arthur Ridley went white.

"I hope Jack is with her," Mrs. Van Vleck exclaimed. "I don't suppose they've gone far without letting us know. See when they went, and if they all three went together, Boy. I hope Hill did not go with Elizabeth, Jo, for Elizabeth never takes her except when she goes out alone. Come on, Jo, and pack."

"Hill was with her," the Duchess said despairingly. "Hill never budes from the hotel unless she's made to. Hill hates Peking." The Duchess made no move to pack—or to do anything else.

Mrs. Van Vleck took off her rings and her diamond wrist-watch, a string of pearls and a ruby-lizard, and buttoned them all into her silk underskirt's wide pocket.

Loon Got returned.

Miss Kent and the maid had gone out together two hours ago, almost an hour before Mr. Thorn had left the hotel.

"Perhaps she has gone to see Miss Feng, and is there all safe, and Mr. Feng will keep her until things quiet down. Give me your rings, Jo; I've plenty of room left. We'll have to carry our jewel-cases somehow."

"I'll find out," Ridley snapped. If Elizabeth Kent had reached the Fengs', he had little doubt that Feng Yu would keep her. But how? It was said that Feng was an international pacifist, and always had dis-

allowed the Boxers; but he was the Empress Dowager's creature first and last. Arthur Ridley was trembling now. And what if Elizabeth had not reached the Feng house? What if she were out on the Peking streets!

"You must come at once," he ordered sharply. "Never mind your things. I cannot give you another minute. Now!"

Hilda Van Vleck's eyes flashed. The Duchess' jaw set into stone; her tears were done.

"I shall not go without my nephew," one said hotly, "not an inch."

"I certainly shall not leave here without my niece and poor Hill," the other said coldly.

"You've got to!" Ridley told them fiercely. "You can walk, or I'll have you carried. I'll get you across the street, and then I'll see to Miss Kent. I won't come back without her."

Mrs. Van Vleck darted out of the room. It was many a year since Hilda Van Vleck had darted! The Duchess did not move.

The American woman was back very quickly. Ridley had his hand on the Duchess' shoulder—literally pulling her up from her chair.

Mrs. Van Vleck looked like two beings—she had so many things over her arms and in them. Daniel Webster peeped out jauntily from the folds of her petticoat, John Brown gazed out gloomily from the fold of a rug.

"I've got your jewel-case too, Jo. I broke your box open." She might have added that she had torn her fingers and nearly sprained her wrist. "Here's your hat." She wore her own.

"Now you go along, Lord Arthur, and look for Elizabeth. We are all ready to start the instant they

come. The Duchess will not go without her niece, of course—silly of you to ask it. I'll not budge without Jack. We'll come quick enough when they are here, too. That's a gun! Move farther from the window, Jo. We'll sit on the floor, that's best. Off you go, Lord Arthur. I'll take care of Jo."

"You are both coming with me *now*," Ridley answered. "I've got the Chief's orders."

"I take orders from no man," the New York woman assured the Englishman grimly. "And what's more, I am an American citizen, I'd have you know."

"So I supposed," the exasperated man said sharply. "And you'll be a dead one, if you don't come out of here, and come now. And I have your own Minister's orders too, Mrs. Van Vleck," Ridley lied.

"Him! I don't care if you've got the President's, I shall wait here for Jack."

"Oh, do be sensible, both of you. Probably Miss Kent and Thorn are in the Legation already. Every White is being herded in there quickly. Your blue-jackets and our guards have been at it for hours"—an exaggeration of time—"and some of the Chinese are helping them, and there's a ten to one chance, on my honor there is, that we'll find Miss Kent and Thorn there already."

It was this that prevailed with them at last and in no way the hot missile that hurtled hissing through the ceiling and fell at the Duchess of Charnley's feet. She looked at it coldly; it was not of such things that she was afraid. For herself she was no coward—but she was one for Elizabeth and for Bill, poor dear.

Ridley thrust them, still protesting, into the Legations' guarded opening at last. How he got them there they never remembered, but Arthur Ridley would not have forgotten if he had lived for a century.

He thrust them in and turned on his heel and ran toward Ch'ien Mên. Elizabeth Kent had not been in the Legations when he had gone to the *Hôtel de Pékin*. No white woman had come in since, the sentry had assured him in whispered reply to Ridley's whispered question.

"The Chief will break me for this," he told himself as he ran, "but I don't give a damn for that or for anything else but to find Elizabeth!"

CHAPTER XXX

FOR more than a fortnight, nearly three weeks, John Thorn and Elizabeth lived in that peasant courtyard and in one of the small rooms that opened into it; a stern test of character, of compatibility or the reverse, and even of mere acquaintance.

Of what was going on in Peking they could only conjecture, either this first night (their one night out in the courtyard) or afterwards during their weeks in the hovel. They heard rushing feet, screams and groans, the noise of explosions and shot, they saw the sky redden and smoke; but they knew nothing. That disaster stalked in Peking, and that they were prisoners were their only certitudes.

It was the grimmest experience of John Thorn's life. To Elizabeth it was unprecedented hideousness.

He had been anxious—and cold—up on the Western Hills with Feng Me-lah, but that had been a moonlight picnic compared to this. Was the rest of his life going to be getting lost, or worse, with girls, and not even American girls, he wondered as they sat there

together in the courtyard. How much more of life was he going to have? His life didn't look a very good one to John Thorn just now. What had happened to his aunt? The question tortured him constantly.

There was one thing only that rejoiced him, and it did rejoice him: that he had come in here to the English girl before the courtyard was bolted fast; that she was not here alone.

Lord, but she was behaving well! What wonderful things girls were, when you really came to know them—some girls! Feng Me-lah had been a brick up there on the hill; but that had been no ordeal at all compared to this, and Elizabeth Kent was behaving every bit as splendidly as Feng Me-lah had.

They had no food. He had no sort of weapon; and he might have to kill little Miss Kent. Had she thought of that? He hoped to God she had not, but he felt pretty sure she had. She was quick-witted enough, he had discovered long ago.

Thorn had a pocketful of money. Elizabeth's purse was not empty, and the only ring she wore was valuable. It had been her mother's engagement ring.

Should they try to buy their way out, or to bribe one of the Chinese to take a note or message? they asked each other anxiously. But they decided against attempting either. They would be stripped of all they had and get nothing in return.

But the next day when they had gained the hovel's shelter, the cheerless, unclean little room was a boon—their only one, unless being together and able to speak together in their own tongue was one, and unless the chivalrous devotion of a Chinese peasant woman was another.

The meager shelter of that comfortless room was

given them by one of those unbelievably odd chance happenings that are even more frequent in real life than in fiction.

Almost twenty-four hours had passed since Thorn had looked into an open courtyard to see what it was like anyway.

No one had molested them.

But no rescue had come.

They had not eaten. Their thirst was worse than their hunger. The heat, even in the courtyard's shelter was appalling. Elizabeth's ankle was maddeningly worse. She had been glad when Thorn again asked to look at it. And when he did he was helpless to do more than bind it up in his own handkerchief.

They talked, and they were silent.

Elizabeth sat or lay against the tree where he had found her. She shifted her position a little from time to time only because she had to; it pained her foot so each time that she did so.

Thorn walked up and down once in a while, lest his body should cramp; determined to keep as fit as he could. But he seldom went more than a few feet from Miss Kent. There wasn't much he could do for her, nothing now; but he could stick.

"If we only could know what has happened!" It was the nearest complaint, and the only one the girl made—made aloud at least—through all the long ordeal.

"If we only could!" the man echoed.

It was an hour later when she said, "Mr. Thorn, can you kill me, if you need to?"

He turned in his pacing and slipped down beside her, and took her hand in his. Elizabeth's fingers clung to his.

"Yes," he told her.

"And you will?"

Thorn nodded.

"Even if I struggle and scream?"

Thorn looked into her eyes; their eyes were steady.

"Yes," he promised, "if it comes to that."

"Thank you." Elizabeth's voice was steady but her face twitched.

John Thorn's face was cold with its sweat. He drew a trifle closer and put his other hand on the girl's shoulder.

"But, it won't, you know," he whispered. "We hope it won't."

"Of course," Elizabeth said quietly.

Neither moved nor spoke again for several moments.

"But it did, in the Mutiny. I feel as if this were another mutiny."

Thorn did not reply.

"Don't you?" the English girl persisted.

The man nodded. He had found it easier to nod than to speak to her several times already.

"Perhaps the Campbells will come again," Elizabeth said dreamily. "I wonder if they know about us at home."

"I hope to God they do," Thorn muttered. "I reckon they do! I don't suppose the wires have been destroyed; and if they have, some of our folks will have got some sort of message off from Legation Street to Tientsin if only on shanks' old nag. They must be doing something in the Legations. There are a lot of them there, you know. We mustn't worry any more than we can't help. They'll hunt for us, trust them for that—as soon as they can. They may

find us almost any time. And things may quiet down as suddenly as they tuned up."

They tuned up pretty badly at that very moment. The courtyard shivered from the impact of an explosion. A cracking splinter of wood fell in from over the fastened gateway. Shrieks out in the street were maniacal pandemonium.

"Do you think they have broken into that other courtyard?" Elizabeth asked.

"Sure they haven't. I don't think they will either. This isn't much of a place for a mob to trouble about; they've bigger fish to fry out there. This is a pretty mean sort of hotel we have struck, but all the safer for that," Thorn said stoutly. Then—"Good Lord!" he gasped as he caught Elizabeth to him quickly, smothered her face against his breast, covered her body with his as completely as he could.

The shell had not been much of a shell though, or they must have died there in a wrecked Peking courtyard. It had hurtled down on them with a horrid devastating noise to crash at their very feet, splutter there sickly a heart's throb and then roll over, a little way from them, in broken splintered nothingness.

Thorn looked up, involuntarily perhaps, to see if another, and a better one, would follow it. There was nothing in the air above them. But he noticed something come to an upper window in the two-storied house. It had been a blank, blind window until now, he was sure.

A Chinese woman looked down from it. The light was full on the window. The woman gave a start and moved back instantly. Thorn believed that he had caught a glint of recognition in her startled eyes.

A Chinese woman hurried to them from the house,

a "small-footed" who must have been well "bound," for she ran swiftly and scarcely swayed at all.

"Come long same me quick," she cried to Elizabeth. To the man she paid not the least attention.

Miss Kent looked up; Thorn thought she almost smiled. "Shing Kan," she murmured wearily.

"No talk! Come quick," the woman hissed. She was badly frightened, Thorn thought. "Kill this side. All kill velly bad quick. Come!" She caught Miss Kent's arm and tugged at it imperatively.

"Where to? And why?" Thorn demanded.

The woman paid no more attention to him than she had before.

"Where do you want us to come, Shing Kan?" Elizabeth asked listlessly. "I wish you would give me a drink of water."

"Can do. Come long me quick. Must do."

"I can't walk. I believe I am too tired to crawl. Please get me a drink, Shing Kan." Elizabeth did not move. John Thorn kept his arm about her.

For reply, the Chinese peasant woman bent down and snatched up the English girl. "Top side some bettel safe side me dlink get," she promised.

A rain of bullets pelted against the courtyard wall.

"We'd better go with her," Elizabeth said, none too assuredly. "I think she will help me. I am almost sure that I can trust Shing Kan."

"Must tlost!" Shing Kan cried hotly. "Me be catch, me be kill."

"She can't take us to worse than this," Elizabeth suggested feebly.

"God knows!" The man was wavering. There were hideous noises out in the street, there were horrid missiles in the frightened air. "But I think we'd best

keep in the open, such as it is, while we can. Do you really know her?"

"She was my *amah* for a time. I liked her. I think she liked me. And I must have a drink."

John Thorn wanted one himself pretty badly—but it was Elizabeth's thirst that all but decided him.

"I wish I knew if I ought to let you risk it. God, I wish I knew." They were near death out here now, he knew. But there might be worse deaths inside. Out here he could kill Elizabeth Kent—if it came to that. He might be overpowered inside that door before he could lift a finger.

The woman paid no attention to John Thorn. She had not even looked at him yet. But she struggled to pass him. And she laid her face against the English girl's.

"Me good *amah*. Me do most best ting to me Missie," she said in a tone that somehow made Thorn more than half-inclined to trust her.

"Please let go of her," Elizabeth begged. "I know she will give me a drink of water." Elizabeth began to cry. All her Spartan endurance had given way at the temptation of a gourd of water. "Let me go with Shing Kan. I wish," she added not ungratefully, "that you would come with us—but you must decide that."

"In we go then!" John Thorn said huskily. "Thought I'd let you go without me, did you! Here, I'll carry her," he told Shing Kan roughly. "You let go."

Shing Kan yielded Elizabeth to him instantly. When she had, she took hold of his arm and pushed him into the open door and fastened it behind them.

"Come slow," she commanded. "Bad place. Plenty hole, plenty black."

It was both. Darkness could not have been blacker. Thorn's boots found more than one hole in the earthen floor before they reached the almost as dark, windowless room into which she half led, half pushed him at the shallow building's other end.

Thorn managed to strike a match without putting Miss Kent down. There was nothing at all in the room—unless there were vermin. It was indescribably dirty. Such light as there was came down a broken ladder that leaned against a hole up near the ceiling.

"Stay this," Shing Kan told Elizabeth. "Me come quick."

She had gone as she spoke.

Thorn stood stock-still, too troubled to move, almost too anxious to think. The girl he was holding did not move.

It seemed an eternity to them both before the Chinese woman returned, but Thorn's watch knew it was not two minutes.

She carried a bamboo pail in one hand, dragged a rough stool with her other. From one sleeve she produced two gourd drinking-bowls, from her other sleeve she gave them millet-cakes.

Then she went away again at once, telling Elizabeth as she went, "Me come me Misse quick."

John Thorn put Elizabeth carefully down on the old worm-eaten, paintless stool, filled a gourd from the brimming bamboo bucket, and watched her drain it twice before he filled the other for himself.

It shocked him to see how passionately she drank. But he caught her hand back when she reached it down to refill the gourd for a third drink.

"Presently. After you have eaten," he said, and Elizabeth let him have his way.

CHAPTER XXXI

“**A**ND I just loved that Chinese girl. I loved her inside fifteen minutes. She has fixed us up nice and dandy in here—and I wish you could hear her order me about. She brought your nephew a broom, ma’am, a bunch of twigs tied together with some sort of strong, bendable vine, and told him to sweep the floor! And she made me do it. Well—the floor needed a sweep; that’s no lie. She shoved us in here quick, then she got us a bucket of water. We were pretty thirsty all right. She got us some flat cooky things that wouldn’t be thought too much of in New England, but they tasted good to us—then. And she lugged a stool in for Miss Kent to sit on. Your own dear nephew was let stand up or sit on the floor, whichever he liked. She got rugs and old sacks and rigged up a bed or sofa of sorts for Miss Kent, and then I fell heir to the stool. It was pretty dark in here, but Susan Cohen (that’s what I call her and she doesn’t seem to mind) produced a brace of lanterns. One is made out of stone and holes and the other (they are not twins) is made of oyster-shell scrapings. We keep candles burning in them, and can just see each other a few inches off. She has rigged up no end of comforts for Miss K. Me she engaged as *femme de chambre*, inside porter and general slavey without waiting to investigate my references. Nice, easy-going lady, I call her. Oh! I’m her hired girl all right! I wasn’t for trusting her at first, but Elizabeth would from the start. Susie’s all right. She loves ‘Missie’ (that’s what she calls E. K.) like a dog. I think no end of Susie now. And

I'm going to ask her to find some way of getting this letter delivered safely to you. I think she'll do it for me; if not, she will for Miss Kent; she would do any mortal thing for her. I can't write much more for my note-book is nearly full. Lucky I had it and a good long pencil. I want you to get this so that you won't fret your dear heart sick over us. Tell the Duchess she's not to either, E. says. And tell her from me that we will take care of Miss Kent—Susan and I. I wish Hill had got back with a doctor and a bottle of arnica. The foot is pretty bad. But S. C. is not a bad nurse and I fancy myself as M. D. It is easier to-day, and we think the swelling is going down a bit. E. K. won't be neglected any while Miss Cohen and I are about. I'm here all the time. Susan has to slip in when she can. She seems considerably afraid of her gentlemen friends out yonder. And there is a lot we want to know that she doesn't tell us. Either she does not know what the row outside is about, or she won't say. And that is what we want to know. But no human creature could be better to another than that Chinese woman is to Miss Kent—and I come in for the leavings. You couldn't believe half the things she has done for our comfort. We have enough to eat, and most of it is quite good enough. Water and cookies were just *hors d'œuvre* until she could do better. She hustles in any amount of tobacco. I'd like the Chicago papers delivered more regularly—but there, you can't have everything, even in China. Hill will have told you where we are, unless she eloped and didn't get back to the hotel. This is a stone shanty just off Pewter Lane."

Thorn had miscalculated. Shing Kan would have nothing to do with the letter of which the above was a

fragment. She would not be pumped, and she would not even pretend to attempt to get any sort of message through to Legation Quarter.

Because the English girl had been kind to her, Kan was risking her life for her—her sheltering of two foreigners amounted to no less than that. And all that she could contrive to do for their comfort in the unused room in which she had hidden them, she did eagerly. But she neither would fetch nor carry. And she would tell them nothing. Shing Kan knew a good deal and believed that she knew a great deal more than she did. In that the peasant woman and the Empress Dowager, back now in the Winter Palace, were at one with each other.

Shing Kan had been *amah* to several English ladies. She knew how their being comfortable was spelt. And she spared none of her Chinese ingenuity in spelling it for Elizabeth Kent. But she was loyal in all else to her own Chinese cause. She herself was a member of the Red Lamp Light (the women's branch of the Boxers) and had been for years. She knew that she ought to have given these two up to her own Boxer kinsmen, but her heart failed her of that and her Chinese gratitude made it possible. She would not betray Miss Kent or Miss Kent's companion. Still less would she betray the Boxer cause. She would not touch one of the coins Thorn offered. But him at least she would not have let escape. Shing Kan saw clearly a divided duty—she intended to perform it all to the last article. And her simple mind did not realize that to fulfil a divided duty is impossible always.

She was paying a debt—a matter of course to the untutored Chinese peasant—cost that payment what it might. She would have given her life to Elizabeth Kent, but she would traffic nothing to Legation Street.

There were mice in the room. Shing Kan produced a cat and shared its prey with it. She was careful not to let Miss Kent know that she did. She had no respect for ignorant English prejudice and crass bad taste; but she loved Elizabeth, and she shrank from offending the bad taste of the English girl who had offended hers every time she "shook-hands," "dressed" for dinner, ate lobster, or danced with a man's arms about her.

Fewer Chinese eat cats, rats and mice than are said to do so. Travelers who report that none do it are mistaken. Some Chinese like those viands; some who dislike them eat them when they can procure nothing more palatable. Several European women of delicate upbringing and taste testified after the siege of Paris that the flesh of rats and mice was delicious. Shing Kan did not happen to relish mice; she relished hunger less. Peking distinctly was not flowing with milk and honey now, except in the Palace itself and in a few of the palace-like homes of the very rich. Only Kwan, the Hearer-of-cries, knew how the devoted *amah* had contrived to feed Elizabeth and Thorn as she had. Some of their food she had stolen, much she had begged. Almost all that was fit to eat that she could get she had showered on them. She had eaten coarsely and scantily. Often the mice she ate surreptitiously tasted good to Shing Kan.

She contrived a change of underlinen for Miss Kent and even something for the man. One by one articles of convenience and comfort came into the miserable room; cushions, a pot of flowers, cards, dominoes, better food than the Duchess of Charnley and Mrs. Van Vleck were having now; and she gave them a willing servant's cheerful, unstinted attendance, as swift and respectful to do her Missie's every bidding as

ever she had been in the *Hôtel de Pékin*. She did her utmost for them. Even the gods can do no more and no better than their best.

In their close companionship of enforced intimacy there was no embarrassment, no room for embarrassment. The tragedy was too stupendous, the anxiety too sharp, the uncertainty too absorbing.

Were they getting better acquainted? Perhaps not, though prisoned together in the one small room and sharing the same bitter acquaintance with grief. They did not explore each other's minds—they were too distraught and too absorbed in the plight they shared and in their cankering ignorance of what had happened and was happening in Peking. No shred of news filtered through. Sounds came that told much, but told nothing in detail.

But the two things that never fail when those two are real—character and breeding—held by them both. The American man and the English girl did the best they could by each other as loyally as Shing Kan did hers by them. Neither had any inclination to do less; if they had had, surely they must have been ashamed to show each other a smaller courteousness than the Chinese peasant woman gave them both. Sex did not assert itself either in increased dislike or in consciously warmer understanding. But Western character at its best asserted itself triumphantly in the dark, den-like, windowless Chinese room. They tried to amuse each other, and neither was unconscious that the other did so, or was ungrateful.

They tried to play dominoes; they did their bravest to play cards. They tried not to talk torturingly all the time about what was going on outside. They talked of far-off things as much as they could. They

never spoke again of the death-necessity that might come. But they knew that their compact would hold. Both believed that the chance that it would not come was rather more than even, because they so believed in Shing Kan who already had done so much for them. Each was terrified. Both were brave. It was hardest for the man. He had no doubt that death would have caught him instantly out on Pewter Lane. But that would have been his choice, he felt, rather than to stay idle here—coddled and fed by a Chinese girl—while every other white man in Peking must be at valiant grips with death. And he would have made some well-considered desperate effort to break out to Pewter Lane and if need be to death, were it not for Elizabeth Kent. He must stay with her, of course. Nothing else so much as crossed his mind. But when he had climbed up to sit a little alone in the attic-hole to which the rickety ladder led—but its rungs always held, for it was made of bamboo—he muttered to himself again and again, "Caught like a rat in a trap—a man!"

Of what his enforced idleness must be to him, when all the others, as she no more doubted than he, must be fighting, Elizabeth Kent never spoke. But she thought of it. And she remembered why he was here. And she understood perfectly why he made no attempt to escape.

They did not come to think less of each other during their hard days so close together in their hideous shelter. It testifies strongly of them both that they did not.

CHAPTER XXXII

JUST possibly the men and women caught like rats in the trap of entrenched Legation Quarter were more sorely tried than the man and the girl in the Pewter Lane hovel were. It could be argued strongly either way.

They knew what had happened, there in the flimsily barricaded Legations; they were spared the canker of ignorance. They had no enforced idleness. But there were divided counsels in the Legations, and divided authority. Not all the Westerns there came through their ordeal quite as well as John Thorn and Elizabeth Kent did. There were bickerings among the Legation defenders. There were men there who skulked; there were women who were cattish and selfish.

There was hysteria.

But there was heroism.

Their ordeal was indescribable. How they came through it cannot be judged by any who did not share it.

John and Elizabeth, entombed on Pewter Lane had only each other and Shing Kan to please or to annoy. They were spared the wide tangle of countless hundred human nerves jangled, stretched and crowded in the suffering Legations; nerves that throbbed and moaned, the tortured nerves of uncongenial personalities and of twelve often uncongenial nations.

The horror felt in England, what England suffered, perhaps exceeded her Cawnpore Mutiny agony. Cables brought news swifter—brought Legation Street to only around the corner from Printing House Square and Westminster. The Boer War was dwarfed, half

forgotten—except by the women whose men were there. Perhaps the siege of the Legations has dented English history even deeper, will scar it longer than the Indian Mutiny did.

The siege of our Legations lasted eight weeks. Each day seemed a year. And it was hot in Peking. The thermometer showed 108° on the first of August. And little Legation children played at Boxers! Women wept and moaned. Women stole food and hid it. Childbirth racked them, Death comforted them. Women were calm—or seemed so, an even braver womanliness! Women worked, and scorned to show they were excruciatingly weary. Men were mean. Men drank. Men were great in their manhood.

Surely God pitied them all.

There were surprising revelations of character—there always are at such times of human peril and torture.

Elizabeth's aunt showed less metal than Hilda Van Vleck did. The Duchess was stunned, overwhelmed by what she believed had befallen Elizabeth, who would not have been here but for her! She was almost more distressed for her husband. She knew what he was suffering. She wished with all her soul that she had let Elizabeth marry Hugh Lester—or anyone else. And she vowed with all her being that she'd never leave Bill again for an hour in this world or the next. He'd need her Above; she was perfectly sure of that. And there he should have her—close. Joan the Duchess of Charnley did not believe that death would divorce her man and her, or separate them long. She knew that death could not—neither death nor anything else. It was strange that that strong conviction did not brace her as some probably

much lesser thing was bracing Hilda Van Vleck. But it did not. All her sterling sturdiness of soul and character were crumpled up by the gnawing certainty of how her man was suffering now. And it was horrible not to be able to write to him, reminding him what he was to do and to think, enclosing mandatory notes to an exceptionally capable and devoted cook and an excellent valet, reminding one of them how his Grace best liked his mutton chops grilled, reminding the other that his Grace must not be allowed to wear his thinnest undervests after the first of September.

Of the two reunited schoolmate friends the "frivolous" New York woman made the braver showing, put up the prettier fight. There was good stuff in Hilda Van Vleck—lots of it; but that was not the reason. "The moving why" always is far to seek, and almost always is complicated. Mrs. Van Vleck had the less to live for; she had no man to long for and to pity with the real wife's brooding mother-love. But it was not that that braced her. She was violently angry—"mad right through." It did her a world of good. Our less noble qualities do now and then! She wanted to scratch and destroy, and since she couldn't, she worked instead. It would have gone hard with the Boxers if only Mrs. Van Vleck could have got at them and dealt with them to her liking. She no longer thought China "cute." She cursed every bamboo leaf in China, every flower in Chihli. She cursed the Empress Dowager loudest and deepest of all. "Why don't you do something?" she spat at every countryman of her own who came within her speaking distance. She did not waste much of her breath on the others. But she did a lot herself. She washed—floors, garments and babies. She cooked and comforted. She mended and nursed. She was

magnificently helpful, and her womanly ministrations knew no distinctions of race or of individuals, except only that she was more tender to Joan than she was to any other, and that she displayed little inclination to do anything for the Chinese sanctuaried inside the Legation entrenchments. She poulticed Samuel Simons' hurt hand—a chest of tea had fallen on it—as carefully and solicitously as she did a Minister's shot-splintered arm. A bullet grazed her shoe; she kicked it aside contemptuously and went steadily on without spilling a drop of the water she was carrying to the defenders' firing-line. She was not allowed to go there, of course, but she went. She never had worked before, but she packed a whole lifetime of vigorous, exultant hard work into those unspeakable eight weeks. It is incredible that anyone of the imprisoned there was contented or happy; but Mrs. Van Vleck appeared to be enjoying herself, and the fact stands that she was. They were hard hit, she knew, but she was as sure that they would win out as she was that Washington had licked Cornwallis at Yorktown and that Grant had licked Lee all along the line from Fort Sumter to Appomattox. She had read no history except the one-sided text-books of her inattentive school days; but she had no doubt that the right side always did win. Her side was the right side, it went without saying. She ran about the tortured Legations tirelessly, but not once aimlessly or foolishly. How a woman so portly, and all her life so unused to exercise, was able to go so fast and so lightly on very small feet and very high heels baffles explanation and understanding. But she did and was invariably cheery. She thought of John a good deal and kept it to herself. She hoped he was all right somewhere. If he was not, she knew she should break her heart over it by

and by. She had no time for that or any sort of self-indulgence now. She never anticipated things she disliked. She despised for fools those who tried to cross bridges before they came to them, and what she despised in others she never did herself. She worked early and late for eight long weeks, and she inspired others to work and to endure. Some of the missionaries quartered with them proved an asset, others did not. The few spurts of flabby usefulness unenthusiastically yielded by the Rev. Mr. Simons, Mrs. Van Vleck badgered out of him. Samuel Simons no longer smiled. He had not smiled once since he had hurried, sweating profusely, into the British compound—it was farthest from the firing-line and presumably was safest. There was most food at the German Legation at first. But Baron von Ketteler and all his satellites had a nasty way with contemplative non-combatants and were unmistakably determined to provender their own countrymen first and most. Mrs. Van Vleck accepted her share of the rationed food reluctantly and picked out the second-best titbits for Jo and the best titbits for Daniel Webster and John Brown when and while there were any. She hid her jewels and those of the Duchess craftily—all but her own enormous sapphire which she secreted on her own person. It was a very fine stone, as big as a nutmeg, and had belonged, so Mrs. Van Vleck believed, to Philippa of Hainault at whose white throat it once had gleamed its royal blue.

Countless prayers went up from the besieged Legations—more in those eight weeks of human agony than Occidental souls in the Orient had sent God-ward before since Russia stole Vladivostok from China. But Hilda Van Vleck did not pray, though she knew that

she wanted desperately to do so. The woman had not prayed for years (though she often went to church in New York) and she felt that it would be cheap and insolent for her to do it now, just because she was in the second worst scrape of her whole life. So she worked double-hard instead. Perhaps the recording angel accepted the substitute. And if Paul Van Vleck's wraith happened along to Legation Street just then he must have taken off his hat to the wife who thought of him with increased bitterness every day. The tolerant affection she once had given him had died long ago, for he had dealt her the one wound that never heals. And she never suspected that in doing it he had engendered in her (at least in large part, for she came of good strong human stuff) the fine fighting heroism that made the most observant and unemotional of all the Legation diplomats say, "She's worth any six men here"—an exaggeration that was not undeserved. She carried no lamp in her hand, and her voice was not low, but the frivolous, fashionable Lady of Fifth Avenue was a wealth of health and succor in the Legations' hell. She behaved like a thoroughbred for eight solid weeks. The frivolous, fashionable woman often does under provocation that she considers sufficient.

Hilda Van Vleck was not proud of herself. And she had no right to be. For she only did what it was not in her not to do—which is what nine out of ten of us always do.

Hope leapt up, sickened and died.

When would relief come? Relief was on the way. Relief had failed to get through; had been cut off and destroyed. No other relief could reach them in time.

But there were grim old war dogs and suave diplo-

mats of several nations who held on grimly. There were good martinets there who kicked men of lesser breed into determined action. There were a few saints who sweetened a little the sweltering festering hell of unspeakable confusion and grueling heat.

Perhaps their human anxiety, hope deferred, was the worst of what they suffered; or perhaps it was the terrible heat and the more terrible smells; perhaps the human crowding that grew and grew, as almost daily some rampart, or even some Legation, grew intolerably unsafe and had to be given up, and more and more sweating, suffering human bodies crowded into the already over-packed British compound.

Everywhere there were Chinese refugees, most of them silent, all miserable and trembling and destitute, all to be fed while our own food lasted.

The flames that leapt up, as if all the Tartar City were burning at once, and the terrible barking of maddened dogs made day and night hideous and terrifying.

Ice gave out. Soap ran low.

Outside the besieged Legations there was fearful slaughter. The Boxers slaughtered every Chinese they found who could not prove himself or herself (man, woman, child) not a Christian.

And still no help marched to them along the Tientsin Road.

Hill the maid did not come—then or ever.

Lord Arthur Ridley kept his word. He did not come back without Elizabeth Kent.

He never came back at all.

None ever knew where or how he died.

A kinswoman found his signet ring in a Peking pawnshop a few years afterwards and prayed that his death had been swift, instant.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THERE was one woman in Peking more troubled and anxious than any woman or man in the besieged Legations: T'zū Hsi the Empress Dowager. There were several Chinese men—Chinese and Manchus—quite as perturbed as any man in the Legations. But they were not to be pitied as T'zū Hsi was. For each had his own firm conviction of how the hot, seething situation ought to be handled. Those convictions differed, but they all were firm—bedrock for Chinese policy to walk on and to build on, if only Her Majesty could be induced so to order it. To the torture of Jung Lu's anxiety—of Li the cobbler's, of Tuan's, Li Hung Chang's, His Majesty the Emperor's own, of Lee T'ing's and of Feng Yu's—was not added the sicker torture of indecision.

Of the cross she carried then, the Sacred Mother's indecision was the worst part.

Could Christendom's judgment be fair, and Western understanding adequate, it might be agreed that the most bitterly tried soul in Peking in the summer of 1900 was the soul of T'zū Hsi the Empress; she the one above and beyond all others most deserving of pity—and *sympathy*. The statement is not offered for acceptance, not even for Western consideration. It is a statement of personal conviction and quite consciously as unacceptable to the wisdom of the West as it would have been to Sun Yat-sen of Canton.

Yehonala was not always or entirely a good woman. (Have you known many? Count.) The spots on her great story are sore. Most of the inditements against her have not been proven. A few have. Several have not been disproved.

The narrowest prejudice cannot deny or question her greatness. Her story cries out for its Homer.

Her unusual and really marvelous story and its amazing achievements may, one thinks, be summed up quickest and most simply in three significant words—charm, character, birth.

No one who ever saw her denied her charm. And charm in the possession of woman or of man is a far mightier weapon than either the pen or the sword; in the hand of either a man or a woman who is intelligent also, it approaches invincibility. T'zū Hsi's lasted until she died. For millions of Chinese and a handful of others it survived her long.

Prejudice itself, or the malice of hatred that studies her life with a modicum of intelligence and some industry, will be hard pushed to doubt that she had strong character.

Her birth was fine. She was not the "slave-girl" of the Western journalism of some few years ago, who, thrust or lifted into the overcrowded harem of Hsien-Feng and catching his easy attention, rose to giddy heights of nefarious power. She was nobly born, the daughter of a Manchu of rank. She went from her birth home on Pewter Lane to the Forbidden City as a *Kuei Jen* Concubine. She was seventeen. She was called the Yehonala Concubine because hers was the great Yehonala Clan. All her life, among the many honorific names showered upon her, she often was called simply Yehonala because of her father's honorable rank—and it not the least of her titles. In China a concubine holds an honorable and honored place. It was so in David's time and Abraham's. She did catch her husband's attention. With a few ups and downs she held it. Other women have done that and without being condemned for it or painted

black. The man to whom a concubine is united is *her husband* from the first, in China, although she is not his wife. She is no more his slave than is his wife. She has her rights.

The Yehonala Concubine bore the Emperor a son, his first. That automatically raised her to the great rank of Heir Apparent's Mother. Such was the witchcraft chicanery by which she got her first step up; a mere act of nature and of the gods—in China.

After that her long life was an almost steady up-climb, the climb of character, charm, intelligence, will and indefatigability. When scarcely twenty-two this "shut-in" Manchu girl was the virtual ruler of the enormous, difficult Chinese Empire. She was "shut-in" only because of her great palace position; otherwise, being a Manchu, she could not have been a "shut-in." She ruled China for fifty years.

Her statecraft was at least equal to Elizabeth Tudor's. Her courage at least equaled Napoleon Bonaparte's.

T'zū Hsi had two great defects and one sad handicap.

Her defects were her weak superstition and her inability always to decide correctly whom to trust and whom to distrust. In a woman of her acumen and intelligence that inability seems inexplicable. Of her pitiful, inordinate superstition it may be stated in apology that not many centuries have passed since witchcraft was believed in in all England and in a not inconsiderable part of New England, and it may be asserted that several silly and horrid cults of superstition flourish to-day in London and in New York. And there are educated, intelligent Western women (perhaps a man or two) who will not sit down thirteen to dinner, walk under a ladder, do anything important on

Friday, have lilac, may or peacocks' feathers in their rooms, sit where five lights are burning, and only the god of Idiocy knows how many more such remarkable oddments. At least they are Western and educated, and believe themselves intelligent.

The Empress Dowager's handicap was her ignorance of what the barbarian peoples, whom she held her Country's enemies, had the power to do against China. And she was ill-advised enough to fear them less than she disliked them.

She had much prejudice—she was a woman.

She did not always love wisely—she was human.

One radiant night in the Pomegranate Month the Old Buddha stood on a high mound outside her Palace walls watching the great Catholic Cathedral burn. She was simply clad, for her, but regally. Her long robe was of the sacrosanct apricot-yellow. Its few embroideries were symbolic. She wore her splendid Manchu head-dress. Her few jewels were priceless. Her face was grave.

She knew what that holocaust meant. She knew how many were sheltered in the French Cathedral. She always had disliked it. She disliked every hallmark of the barbarian West that was stamped on her capital. But she loved her people, even those who erred. *And* were the Boxers going too far? Daily Jung Lu, Li Hung Chang, Yüan Shih-k'ai and Feng Yu warned her that there would be a terrible price to pay for all this. Could they be right? Had she blundered? The augurs and the auguries had differed.

T'zũ Hsi did not like bloodshed. She had ordered, "Off with his head," oftener than Richard the Crook-

back ever had; she had ordered "Off with *her* head" on occasions and knew that she might do it again; but she did not like bloodshed for bloodshed's sake. She wanted all the foreigners out of China once and for all; but she would much rather they had gone to stay away forever without any of this.

And her Peking was being all but destroyed. T'zŭ Hsi loved her city. She loved all her possessions. There would have been neither want nor pain in all China, if she could have compassed it.

Was the old home on Pewter Lane safe? She had given her orders. But were the Plum Blossom Fists out of hand? She must speak to Feng Yu about it again on the morrow. Yehonala had only been back to her childhood's home once since she had left it a Concubine-bride, but her childhood memories held. Her face quivered. Then it lit and her eyes leapt to the burning Cathedral, delighted, as Chinese eyes must be, at the splendid beauty of that tremendous flaming. Great sheets of living fire rose up imperially to the turquoise sky, turquoise as day in the light of flaring curls of flame. Yehonala clapped her tiny hands and cooed her delight. A horrible old woman? Again let her apology come from the West. When the great Chicago fire was licking a city to cinder and ashes, women whose hearts were cracking at their homes' destruction and at the loss of their all, exclaimed at the stupendously beautiful spectacle. Western women life-imperiled in imminent shipwreck have rejoiced at the grandeur of the picture of the sea storm. True, the West has not bred many such women. China has not bred many T'zŭ Hsis.

Gods! Half Peking seemed burning! In twenty quarters flame shot up. Streets and buildings she had

known all her life were smoking and aflame. This was half a city's holocaust. Had she been wrong? Was not this too hot a price to pay even for the extermination of those hated Legations? Peking afire! Had then Jung Lu been right? She never had doubted his loyalty, but only his wisdom; Jung Lu who had served her well all their lives, her kinsman, the boy playmate of her earliest childhood. He never had cheated or deceived her. Why had she not listened to Jung Lu?

Tush! Those were but bonfires. They would be put out soon. Or soon they'd die down. That one toward Tuan Hua's old residence smoldered dwindling already.

The Empress Dowager turned away. She walked slowly back to her Palace, to a courtyard all sweet with the night-flowers of June, all precious with marbles, all eloquent with memories.

The Empress sank a little wearily on to a bench and buried her face in her hands.

Perhaps an hour she brooded so. She thought of her mother. She thought of a doll she had loved. She had snuggled it to her lovingly all night long the last night she had lain in her narrow bed at Pewter Lane, forty-eight years ago to-night! She thought of her husband and sighed a little contemptuously—the saddest sigh a woman can sigh, East or West. She thought of her son. The woman's eyes filled, her bosom heaved. She had loved him and planned for him; and he had died from decrepitudes not inherited from her. She knew that she had been whispered to wish for his death, and to have aided if not caused it. Her lips curled. And he never had loved her! She rose and paced the courtyard.

There in her privacy T'zū Hsi thought of a thou-

sand things and brooded over them; ran the years of her life through her mind as the devout might the beads of a rosary through slow, lingering fingers.

She sat again and looked toward the lotus pond. Her face was expressionless. Only Kwan Yin-ko knew of what old Yehonala was thinking now.

A bell tinkled in a temple; a gong crashed in another. T'zū Hsi rose abruptly and clapped her hands.

"Tea in the Personal Pavilion," she commanded. "Then we will watch the devil-dancers from the Marble Lace Terrace. Send for Feng Yu."

It was hours before Feng Yu came. He had to be found and recalled from a long errand she had sent him on yesterday.

The Old Buddha waited for him patiently, chatting lightly with her ladies and feasting with them in the lacquered pavilion. She kept the devil-dancers waiting while she listened to her flute boys, seeming not to see, seeming not to hear what belched and screamed up from beyond the pink walls.

The devil-dancers are not what they sound. They are a jolly sight of agile, twisted grotesqueness, one of the jolliest sights on the streets of Peking. There the devils are Chinese boys picked up anywhere and anyhow, drilled a little in the bending, gyrating dance, rigged out in cheap, clownish, almost pretty costumes and queer tortured crêpe masks, and then put through their paces on any convenient street or alley. With characteristic Chinese *sang-froid* they go through their complicated exhibition with entire composure and with rarely a mistake. Callous or poor indeed is the passer-by who does not pause to watch and to reward them with a *cash* or so. And the women laugh until they ache to see Chinese boys in such trousers. For these street devil-dancers wear wide painted trousers.

The devil-dancers and dances at the Lama Temple are much more elaborate. The costumes are fearful and beautiful. The robes are costly; the masks are false-heads of painted and gilded parchment—mouth-agape animals most of them.

The Empress Dowager's devil-dancers were excellently trained and finely proficient. But oddly enough they resembled the diabolical *corps-de-ballet* of the Lama Temple far less than they did the devil-dancers of the city streets. For to her last there was a good deal of gamin in the Old Buddha.

They did well to-night—though it were more exact to say early morning; for they danced until dawn, and they did not dance very long.

Their Imperial employer watched them with smiling approval, chuckling more than once, and when she dismissed them ordered them largess.

Then she kept her privacy until Feng Yu came.

T'zū Hsi paced up and down—the woman was restless—in front of her friendship-wall.

But she kept it behind her most of the time.

Once she turned to it abruptly and stood gazing at it deeply in the clear early light.

Only one who still lived had brushed or cut on its panel spaces. All the others were dead. But that was not why a hard sob choked in Yehonala's throat. She knew that the vacant panels would remain blank. She should not again make a friend. She was too old for new friendship. Love might come again and be given again. While one lives one can love and may win love; the love of little children, of speechless, uncritical pet-things, the love of flowers and of birds. But friendship is more difficult of growth, more exacting—or so she thought.

She needed friendship. And she must make mere love do. The panels still uninscribed must always be so—beautiful in themselves, yet something like gaps in a lovely mouth.

Stay though! There were only three panels left. That should be mended in part. Feng Me-lah should write or paint one. It was not friendship between them, only love. The child was too young for her friendship or to give it her. But they gave each other love. Love should suffice. The chit did not write quite to the Old Buddha's liking. Her painting was more skilful, but not of the quality that would grace an Imperial friendship-wall. But it should serve. Green Pearl should picture a panel under her mistress' own tutelage.

Feng Me-lah's love was dear to T'zŭ Hsi.

And she knew that she had her people's love. China's love! No one else had that. No one else had the love of all China.

China's love! The greatest possession on Earth or in Heaven! China's love! Not again would she ask more than that. It was enough.

At last Feng Yu came.

"Do not kneel," Yehonala commanded. "Come close."

Feng Yu obeyed, of course, and waited.

When she gave him her burning command, he almost betrayed his surprise.

He had been sure that the Great One had sent for him for conference of statecraft; perhaps to tell him that she had heard, as he had an hour ago, that relief for the Legations was on the way, far off, but inevitably coming. He had hoped that she had turned to his counsel at last. Even now the hideous

situation might be saved in part, the punishment lessened.

And she had called him from the work of importance she had given him yesterday, only begun when her messenger had reached him—had recalled him for this!

Then he understood. And his Chinese soul leapt to hers.

"Venerable, Greatest of all Majesties," Feng Yu vowed, and there were tears in his eyes, "thy slave goes at once, proud on his errand, humbly thankful to his August Mistress who has so honored him. Not a stone, not a leaf in Pewter Lane shall be harmed, if none has before I reach that sacred spot. All that is doing there I will learn, and all report at the Hour-of-the-Drake."

Before she could forbid it, Feng Yu had *ko'towed* and was crawling backwards.

"Wait," Yehonala commanded. "You must eat first."

"Pardon your worm, Holy Mother, I entreat that I may eat when I return."

"Rise up then and go on your feet. I thank you, Feng Yu."

He rose and went walking backwards. The Empress paid him her radiant, tender smile.

"The wonderful, wonderful woman!" Feng Yu said to himself as he hurried to his litter.

When her servants came whose duty it was to make all right in her own gardens and courtyards, when sure that she was elsewhere, they found on a panel of the Old Buddha's friendship-wall that had been blank a few hours before a great crimson character, newly, beautifully brushed: "China."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THORN looked up with a smile when Shing Kan came in, but he instantly caught, or thought that he did, a pleading in her slant-eyes. His smile stiffened in quick anxiety and he instinctively moved in front of Elizabeth Kent, not to protect her from Shing Kan—never that now—but to get between her and the bad news that he felt the woman had brought. He knew that it was foolish of him to have jumped to that conclusion. Shing Kan's face was smooth and expressionless, her manner just what it always had been; she had signaled nothing at all. The man's nerves were overstrung. And he had an English girl's life in his hands! Small shame to him that he took fright at the rustling fall of a leaf outside, at a sudden spring of Lo Lung the cat or the scratch of a mouse. He had believed that he should welcome any news, any word from the outer world to break, no matter how jarringly, this monotony and cramp. But he had been wrong; and now that he believed that some such word had come he knew that he was afraid to hear it.

Shing Kan gave them the salutation of respect—she never failed to—then said unexcitedly, "Must come outside, go good place."

Elizabeth got up eagerly.

"Where?" Thorn snapped.

Shing Kan had dreaded that question, but she was prepared for it and answered it at once in her own stolid Chinese way.

"No can make tell."

"You must tell," Thorn told her in a whisper.

Sometimes they spoke aloud, when Shing Kan had said, "All make much plenty safe Can talk." But until she told them so they never dared that much relief and liberty. Shing Kan had spoken softly though clearly; probably some of her precious men were about. Whether they were Boxers or not, Thorn had no idea, even if, as he suspected, the Boxers had risen. But he knew that Shing Kan went in fear of her life and of Elizabeth's and his own, lest her kinsmen should discover that she was giving shelter and food to two foreign devil-ones. And the specimens he had seen of her relatives—if they were her relatives—out in the courtyard that first day, had shown them to be particularly ugly customers.

"Must come now," Shing Kan urged gravely.

"You tell us where first and why," Thorn said as insistently.

"Good place. Plentee more safe."

"I'll be the judge of that. Where do you want us to go? How are we to get there? What's it all been about out in the city anyway? You have been mighty kind, Shing Kan. And I am not going to forget it. But Miss Kent will not go out of this place until I know that she ought."

"Me no do bad ting me Missie," the woman said proudly. "You no likee come, you stay this place. All same Shing Kan. Me Missie she come topside good place long me now. Must come now."

"Miss Kent does not go without me. I'm her chief-of-staff as her soldier folks put it. Look here, Susan, be reasonable. Tell us what it's all about, and tell us where you want us to go and why. We won't turn any suggestion of yours down just for fun. But don't you see, woman, that I have got to know all

about it before I can let Miss Kent budge an inch?"

"No can make tell."

John Thorn cursed under his breath.

"Must make go now."

Elizabeth limped to Shing Kan and put her hands on the woman's shoulders.

"Can't you tell me, Shing Kan?" she begged.

Instantly the *amah's* eyes brimmed. But she answered firmly, "No can."

"For God's sake, make her tell you," the man muttered distractedly.

"I wish she would," Elizabeth sighed. "But I know we can trust her, Mr. Thorn. I think we'd better do whatever she tells us to."

"She is Chinese, remember!"

"Sh-sh," Elizabeth warned reprovingly.

Shing Kan smiled a little sadly, a narrow Chinese smile.

John Thorn was more distraught than he ever had been in his life before. The decision should be his; he was determined on that. But how to decide? If he refused, it might mean that he deprived Miss Kent of better safety and kept her here in increasing peril. If he consented, into what might not the *amah* be leading them? Even if Shing Kan were absolutely loyal to Miss Kent, what was Shing Kan's judgment worth? What bad miscarriage might not befall this new plan of hers, and to Elizabeth's cost? What ought he to do? Which would be best for this girl charge of his? He did not mind yielding to Shing Kan. He would have yielded gladly to the veriest worm, if only he might have one good reason to think that the English girl's best safety lay that way. For himself he would have preferred almost any move,

even a move in the dark, to this continued stagnation here. But would he be right to risk it for the girl? Would he be wrong to refuse it for her? Cold sweat beaded thickly on the man's forehead. The question that was torturing him was too big for John Thorn.

He prayed.

They did not suspect that he was doing that. But Elizabeth knew that he was distraught by his own uncertainty. She turned from Shing Kan and laid her hand on Thorn's arm.

"Let us trust her, Mr. Thorn. I do trust her. Let us go with her. But, if you'd rather stay here——"

"Stay here and let you go? Do you mean that? Would you go without me?"

Elizabeth did not answer him at once.

They looked into each other's eyes searchingly—and there was something else.

"I want to go with her," Elizabeth said after a moment. "I believe it is best. But—no—I will not go unless you come too. We'll see it through together if we can."

Color came back to Thorn's face.

"Yes!" he said aloud—louder than he had spoken since he had carried Elizabeth in from the courtyard. "Come on then. May God forgive me, if I am letting you do the wrong thing."

There were two shuttered palanquins out in the courtyard and an humbler chair behind them. A number of Chinese stood and sat stolidly waiting, decently but plainly clad fellows, Thorn thought of the servant sort, who showed no surprise and little interest when the foreign man and woman came out from the house with Shing Kan.

"You are coming with us?" Elizabeth asked.

"All way me come long, all time me stay same you stay," Shing Kan answered.

John Thorn's face had paled again. But he made no protest while Shing Kan settled Miss Kent in the first palanquin. He even lifted her into it himself, though he trembled as he did so, asking himself tormentedly if he were lifting her to death or worse imprisonment. And he did not take his hand from Elizabeth.

"I shall crowd you," he said.

"We both shall, but that can't be helped."

The Chinese woman pointed out that there were three chairs; one for each of them.

"Not on your life!" Thorn told her firmly.

Shing Kan shrugged, but made no further protest. She saw that it would be useless. And she was glad to get Miss Kent away without more difficulty. She was glad that she had not had to take three or four of her countrymen into the house to overpower Mr. Thorn and bring Miss Kent away by force. She had had to get Miss Kent, willing or unwilling; but her orders had been not to frighten the English lady, and no orders would have induced Shing Kan to frighten her Missie, if she could avoid doing it. Mr. Thorn did not interest Shing Kan. She did not like foreign men. She did not like many foreign women. But she liked this man himself more than she disliked him for his race. She had seen his kindness to Elizabeth Kent, and it had won her. She had served too many European ladies not to have become hardened to the close proximity to men that they tolerated, some of them even invited. And she was just enough to realize why Mr. Thorn insisted upon riding in the same chair with Miss Kent and kept his hand close on her arm.

"Not look out," she pleaded. "No safe look out," and drew the shutter down. They did not hear her bolt it.

The chair was lifted up carefully. They began to move. Thorn knew that they were carried through both courtyards and that out on the street they turned to the left—towards the North. They were not being taken in the direction of Ch'ien Mên. The streets were almost quiet. Was this part deserted, or were all the people barricaded and hidden in their houses? There was no sound of firing. Once or twice a dog barked. He heard a child cry out, but it was hushed immediately. Now and then someone passed them hurriedly, almost noiselessly. They went on and on at the chair-coolies' pace that is swifter than it seems. The steady human jog-trot neither slowed nor quickened. It was dark in the close-shuttered chair. They did not speak at first. They did not say much to each other while they rode on so. Thorn was listening. But he found the girl's hand and held it. She understood its promise of protection and was glad that she was not alone.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE hour they journeyed seemed more—but not to the Chinese woman who, well content now, was dozing in her chair. Shing Kan was tired. She had had more hard and anxious work than sleep or any manner of bodily rest since she had found Elizabeth and Thorn in her brother's courtyard and had risked her life and more to succor and shelter the English girl, sheltering the man also because he

was with Elizabeth and because she realized that his companionship might help Elizabeth when she, her faithful self, could not stay near at hand. To risk her life was little to Shing Kan; she was Chinese, and her life was not easy. But she knew the torture that they would do her before they killed her, if her kinsmen discovered that she had saved a foreign devil from their wrecking. She knew that it would be the utmost and the most fiendish torture that they could devise, for they would hold her three-times dishonored by what she had done: personally dishonored in having aided a European, dishonored in her disloyalty to her kinsman, dishonored in her treachery to the Plum Blossom Fists to which she was vowed, a member even of its women-ones' branch, the Red Lamp Light. And Shing Kan feared torture. Not every Chinese peasant woman is a stoic. Shing Kan had carried her heart in her mouth for many days and nights, and now she was at peace.

She had no fear in sleeping while they went. Those who carried the English lady would not disobey the order that had been given them to bring her safely. They knew that she was going an honored guest as well as a prisoner. And little as they might approve it, not one of them would presume to disobey the powerful Lord who had given them his bidding, nor would they dare let any others molest or harm her. And they were stoutly armed and well protected, strongly accompanied. Nor would they harm the foreign man, or see him harmed, while he rode with the White lady. Not that it greatly mattered.

Her English lady whom she loved and to whom she owed gratitude was going into better safety, into luxurious comfort. Her own danger was over except that, as Shing Kan knew, all in Peking were in great

danger. She had earned an hour of rest, and she took it snoringly, hunched up drunkenly in her rough chair, all her weary flesh glad and gluttonous for sleep.

As the chair-carriers went into Pewter Lane, bannermen waiting for them there had joined them and gone with them. It was almost a cortège that went with them through the Peking dusk; bannermen before the chairs, bannermen behind, bannermen on either side whenever the way was wide enough—bannermen armed and watchful. They had had great command. And neither Chinese nor Manchus would attack or dispute those banners. Elizabeth Kent was well escorted through the fading sunset.

It was deep dusk when they reached the great red gate. Their approach had been waited and watched for; the gate swung back; the carriers padded on without breaking their jog-trot step; and the gate reclosed and was barred again. Down a long, well-kept path, past a hill, through several courtyards, then up a few steps so carefully that even Thorn did not feel the palanquin tilt, over an upstanding sill, and Elizabeth and Thorn both knew that they had been put down, that the palanquin was no longer being carried.

He felt the girl's hand he still held tremble, and his clasp of it tightened.

The shutter was opened.

They were in a room which, because of the sudden light, they could not much see.

But they both saw Feng Me-lah and knew her voice as she bent in over Elizabeth and called her by name and held out eager, careful hands to help her out.

When they stood beside her (it was good to stand again) Elizabeth gave a little frightened gasp.

"Where are we?"

"Safe," the Manchu girl answered. "We hope that we all are quite safe here in the home of Lee T'ing. That is why I sent for you to come here. I am living here—while my father is away."

"I'd rather go to my aunt," Elizabeth began. "But it was very kind of you," she added quickly. "She isn't here, is she?"

"No. She is at your Legation."

"Can I go to her?" Elizabeth persisted.

"Not yet," Feng Me-lah said sadly. "You must sit down comfortably, both of you, and have better food than poor Shing Kan has been able to get for you——"

"She has done her best," John Thorn broke in.

"It shall be remembered," Miss Feng told him. And she half held out her hand—English fashion—to him, then drew it back. He might not wish to shake hands with her, when he knew.

The American saw and understood.

He held out his hand to Miss Feng.

She instantly gave him hers, but she told him gravely, "Our peoples are at war, your people and my own people."

"I thought so, but we are not, you and I," Thorn said and held her hand a moment longer, pressed it again.

"Not you and I, Mr. Thorn," Miss Feng agreed gravely, but she said it with a cordial, lovely smile. And the man gave her hand another grip, a tight fraternal grip before he released it.

"Why can't I go to my aunt, Feng Me-lah?"

The Manchu girl flushed with pleasure that the other had called her by her name—had spoken it kindly; but she paled again quickly with the pain of the

pain she knew she was going to give the other girl. But it had to be told.

"You could not get in—into the Legation Quarter. No one can. We know not much of what is doing there now. But sometimes a small thing trickles out. Your aunt is well. Your aunt, also, is well, Mr. Thorn. I know that for a sureness. And glad is my heart that I can tell it to you. Come you to eat both. Your rice waits your readiness. And while you eat, I will tell you all that is allowed me to say."

"Thank you." They spoke together.

And all three knew that Feng Me-lah would not be asked to tell them more than she was allowed to tell.

Friendship in war, friendship between friends who are also enemies, is a terrible and a sacred thing.

The friendship of these three felt the strain in the long heated weeks that came, but it did not snap. It did not even wear thin.

How the Boxer outbreak had come, Feng Me-lah did not tell. Still less did she explain why it had come. But the fact that it had, she told frankly. She owned that the Legations were besieged. Of what really was thought, what was wished, what planned in the Forbidden City she said nothing. Indeed she only surmised much more than she knew of that part of Peking's tragedy. Even the Old Buddha herself knew but part of it.

The days were hard on them all; the long fevered nights were harder. And the days and the nights were hardest of all on John Thorn. Perhaps they were harder on him than on any other man in suffering Peking.

His body appreciated the more than comfort of Lee T'ing's house and of its unstinted and unforced hospitality. But his manhood writhed that he must

idle here in softness while every other Western man in Peking was battling for his flag and for the women and children besieged in the Legations. For it could not occur to John Thorn that there were men there who shirked and impeded. And he thought of his aunt. He had no anxiety lest she had caved in. He knew her. And for all the ease that always had belonged to her pampered life, Mrs. Van Vleck's nephew could have described not inaccurately how she was spending her time inside the threatened barricades.

Could he get to her? Could he in any possible way contrive to do that? He believed not. But he ached to make the attempt. If failure and death were the result, better so than to loll here in effeminate luxury while she needed him, and while other men were fighting and dying in the Legations. Thorn even envied the enraged Chinese rabble who were playing manlier parts than his, killing and risking themselves in the Peking streets.

Were men dying in the Legations? He could scarcely doubt it. Feng Me-lah had said that he could not get in there. That meant that the Legations were barricaded. They could not be securely enough barricaded, at such short notice as they must have had, not to need to man their flimsy outworks with every armed man they had. He was no soldier, but he understood that much; it was only common sense. When he had strolled out from the hotel all had been serene enough, at least he'd thought so. Had the diplomats known better? If they had, why the devil hadn't they warned them? They could not have known. It had come in a flash—must have. Two hours, three at most, after he had left the hotel he had heard that street-row. For a long time he had

supposed it was just some Chink shindy. Before long he had had to realize it was bigger than that. Shing Kan's flat refusal to get his letter to his aunt had proved it clearly enough. And now Miss Feng had said frankly, "Our peoples are at war." Other fellows were shooting and being shot there, and he belonged with them. Were the women in there safe? How long would they be? How much food had they? How long could they hold out? Was relief coming to them? Had they been able to telegraph? What were these Chinks up to anyhow? It was hell and then some to sit here doing nothing. Lord! he'd give the city of Chicago to be in there where he belonged!

Could he get away, if only to die hideously at the hands of the Boxers? He had no doubt that the Peking streets ran red with blood—and worse. But there was blood, not water, in his veins. Twenty times a day he turned it over in his fevered mind, tried to think it out, tried to plan it.

But could he leave Miss Kent?

His inclination lay in the besieged Legations, or, failing that, out in the death welter of the city streets. But wasn't it up to him to stay here, no matter how ignominiously, with Elizabeth Kent? He could not hope to take her with him, if he could manage to escape. He could not wish to do it. She was safer here than his aunt and hers were in the besieged and probably famined Quarter—even if he could get her into it, which he was sure he could not. And he knew what an English girl's fate would be out on the weltering lanes that must be threaded between here and the Legations. He had little idea of where the Lee house stood.

He could not take her.

Could he leave her?

Thorn had no doubt that Feng Me-lah would protect the English girl as far as Feng Me-lah could; no doubt that she would do it skilfully and pluckily. But how far would Miss Feng be able to do it? How had she managed to get them here? How had she found out where they were? Lee T'ing made no secret of his entire partizanship with the Boxers. He treated John Thorn with all consideration, even with geniality, the little that he was at home. But he stated his own convictions and desires frankly and calmly. It was hideous to be the guest of a man whose dearest wish was to see every alien in China driven away or destroyed, who wished it so intensely that he wished it patiently and was able to express with united coolness and courtesy that were unaffected his flaming wish that the foreigner might vanish from China. It was galling to accept Lee T'ing's hospitality, difficult to swallow Lee T'ing's food. Thorn had to, though. Had he elected to starve rather than eat Lee's rice, it would do Miss Kent more disservice in her need. It was not easy to return Lee T'ing's smooth, courtly courtesy with courtesy as absolute. But the American's self-respect and his pride of race compelled him to do so.

They were free of most of the great Chinese home. Miss Kent was free of all but Lee's and his son's own private quarters. Thorn was made welcome everywhere except in the ladies' courtyard and rooms. They could wander about very much as they chose. But they were not free to go. The gate was shut and guarded. The walls were high.

The Lee ladies Thorn did not meet; they kept their Chinese seclusion in their own flowery quarter. They welcomed the English guest there—but not the Ameri-

can man. To be sure, one of Lee T'ing's daughters had been at the Legations picnic, an exceptional concession on Lee T'ing's part, and even on the girl's own, granted because she had been ill at the Lanterns' last Feast, and so had missed its once-a-year liberty and license. She neither had enjoyed nor had approved the foreign picnic. She had returned from it passionately resolved never again to leave her father's *kuei* until she went to a husband's.

Miss Feng, too, roamed all the place at her own will. The Manchu girl always had had such liberty and more. One night Thorn and Elizabeth, because she did not join them at supper, both suspected that she was not in the house. But neither said so.

In the morning Thorn knew that he had been right. Just at full daylight he saw her litter carried in through the big red gate, saw her descend from it, and hurry—he thought, wearily—into the *Tsê Shih*.

That decided it. He could not go from here while Miss Kent stayed. If Miss Feng had been away once, she might go again. He must stay with Elizabeth Kent to the end.

CHAPTER XXXVI

“**C**OME and see the kitchen. You have not seen it. I think it the prettiest sight in the place.” Feng Me-lah asked it because her heart ached to see how listlessly Elizabeth sat looking at nothing; not even broodingly; just lost in numb misery, paying no attention to Feng Me-lah's two tiny dogs that had all but deserted their mistress for Elizabeth from the moment she came. And until now they

never had failed to divert her, at least for a time. Now they were supplicating her with upraised feathered paws and bright, cajoling eyes in vain.

Elizabeth rose at once. It was less trouble than to refuse.

Feng Me-lah had urged more kindly than she had known. In that charming Chinese kitchen Elizabeth got her first half-hour of real relaxation.

For all her love of dogs and horses, of long country walks, of tennis and golf, and in spite of her clumsiness as a needlewoman, she was a housewifely little thing. The beauty of the Lee kitchen and the beauty of its exquisite fitness appealed to her instantly. And she was no more able not to rejoice in it than T'zū Hsi had been able not to rejoice in the magnificent beauty of the uprushing flames that were devastating Peking or than the Chinese coolie on his way to execution is able not to be happier at the sight of a wayside flower. Our spiritual safety-valves, no matter through what quagmires we walk, no matter what pain gnaws us, stay with us to the last. Heaven has shown us no greater, sweeter mercy than that.

For half an hour, in spite of herself, Elizabeth was happy. The burnished whiteness of the clean, tiled place, the rich glow of the huge Ali Baba jars, the attractive lines of the few odd utensils and the shell-softened rose and silver light that kissed in through the latticed window, made her think it the most beautiful room she ever had seen—which it probably was.

And she fell in love with the Kitchen-gods.

Feng Me-lah forbore to tell her that only one of the three porcelain figures up in their quaint nook on the wall beside the stove was a true Kitchen-god, and the two between which he sat merely his wife and his concubine.

Thorn rose as the girls came back—he had not moved since they left him alone on the terrace—and he saw at once, and was as pleased as surprised, that a touch of color had crept back into Elizabeth's lips, almost a suspicion of sparkle into the gray-green eyes.

"You *must* see the kitchen," Elizabeth told him as she curled down on the terrace steps. "I can't describe it, and I am not going to try. But you mustn't miss it. He can, can't he, Me-lah? There isn't any law against a man going in there, is there?"

"No," Feng Me-lah laughed. "It is a man's room. Our cooks all are men. Mr. Thorn shall see it whenever he likes."

"I'd like to very much some day," the Chicago man lied. Kitchens were not much in his line at the best of times, and no kitchen in China would divert him just now.

"There are three Kitchen-gods in the dearest little shrine, that I could worship myself—the funniest little creatures I've ever seen. I don't know much about figurines and those things, but I think these must be valuable. They are quite as beautiful as they are quaint; I could see that much. And only think, they are going to burn them!"

"Dear me!" John Thorn exclaimed as sympathetically as he could, slipping down beside the two girls. "Why?"

"To send them up to Heaven to report." The girl answered rather awkwardly, the bright tone gone out of her voice. She was afraid that she might hurt Me-lah. She was afraid that Mr. Thorn would laugh. And she knew that that would hurt Me-lah much more. She knew how fond they were of each other, and she often wondered anxiously how it was going to end. And, too, she knew that she could tell the absurd Chi-

nese story respectfully. She had loved the little Kitchen-gods, but what Me-lah had told her about them had rather grated.

Feng Me-lah laughed softly. "I'll tell you about it myself, Mr. Thorn. Ee-lis-bet does not like that she do, for she feels it will make the hurt that I shall hear in her voice that she respect not my religion. It would not make me the hurt. But I like that she is kind." She laid her hand on Elizabeth's, and kept it there affectionately while she went on. "Tsao Shên is a god much important. He keep our cooks to their business. He keep our pots boil right, our food not burn, our dumplings all light and delicious. But he watch us. He know all that is said and is done in the house where he live. And one time each year he go up to on-high and he tell on us there."

"A policeman of a god!" Thorn interjected.

"Yes, you say true word," Miss Feng laughed.

"I call it rather mean of him," Thorn said lazily.

"A police must his duty do," Miss Feng retorted severely.

"Some don't though, not by a jugful!"

Feng Me-lah shrugged. "You speak of police who are men. Tsao Shên is a god. No harm though; we get even with him. We fix him he can tell of us only sweet things. We plaster his mouth thick with sugar or, better, with honey. Most best still we make him all drunk with opium-sleep, those who are rich to afford it. Then when he get him up on-high he can speak nothing at all."

"What a way to treat a god!" John gibed.

"You think?" the girl laughed. "When we fix his mouth sweet we burn him, so he can make his journey in the high smoke. We do it at the end-time of the Poppy Moon. Three days he stay up away, and

we have good time, do all we like while Tsao Shên cannot watch and tell. When he come back the night before the new year he watch us again until again the Poppy Moon is going. But, Ee-lis-bet, only one of the three ones you saw just now will go up, only one we burn—the one who sit between the two other. Only the one is the Kitchen-god. In most families they burn his others with him. But not in my honorable father's and not in this house here."

"What are the other two?" Thorn was not greatly interested; but he owed their hostess-and-more the courtesy of response, and it was better for poor little Miss Kent to listen to such chatter as this—if she were listening—than to think her brooding thoughts. So he said keenly, "What are the other two?"

"Two of his lady friends," a deeper voice than Feng Me-lah's replied promptly.

None of them had heard or seen Lee Wong come. He did not seem to be living at home just now. At least he very rarely was here. But every few days he suddenly appeared and stayed perhaps for an hour.

Their young host did not offer to shake hands with Thorn or with Miss Kent. He often had with them both. But he knew how bitterly they would dislike having to do so now. Feng Me-lah's hand he never had touched, he dared not presume it now. He greeted them each with a deep inclination—to Elizabeth Kent the deepest.

If either Thorn or Elizabeth resented his coming and resented more that he never came without showing them, at least for a few moments, an easy friendliness, they could show no such resentment. They were eating his father's bread, and it was being offered them with brimming and apparently sincere kindness. Elizabeth gave him a sad little smile, Thorn a pleasant

nod and look. Lee Wong sat down contentedly, not far from John Thorn, and neither John nor Elizabeth saw that a look had been signaled to Feng Me-lah and that she had caught and understood it, a message of something that Lee Wong regretted and that Feng Me-lah could not, even though she tried to. It had said, "The barbarians are still holding out."

"You shall have a Kitchen-god to take home with you, three or four very, very best ones, Ee-lis-bet," Miss Feng said, her hand still on the other girl's.

"Can you give gods away?" the English girl asked queerly.

"Yes, and good-luck goes with them. When they are stolen, or bought meanly, they take bad-luck with them. When we give in rightness to a right one, even if we give it to go over the ocean, peace and good-luck go with it." She did not add why she wished to give to this alien girl gods of China, gods whom she loved for dear tradition's sake, to a girl who once had bathed for her bruised and blistered feet, a girl who had done her an even more womanly kindness.

"Do you believe it, *really* believe any of it?" Thorn asked Miss Feng squarely. He was privileged to speak so to Feng Me-lah. There had been peculiar freemasonry between them since a night on the Western Hills.

Feng Me-lah and Lee Wong exchanged a merry glance.

"Believe? What *is* believe, Mr. Thorn? We like our old traditions. The babies believe them. Ee-lis-bet will be good to the Kitchen-god I give her, make him welcome in her own land, but she will not believe him."

Elizabeth did not say, "Perhaps I shall never go home again." But they all were thinking it.

"Miss Kent——"

"Yes, Mr. Lee Wong?" Elizabeth looked up at him as he rose and came and stood before her.

"I have something for you. That is why I am here. I think you will like to have it."

They saw that it was an envelope he took from his robe.

Elizabeth gave a little cry and put the little dogs she had been cuddling away from her gently. "From my aunt?"

"No," Lee Wong told her at once. "I wish that I might do that." And they all believed him. Even John Thorn had to.

Elizabeth Kent seemed half unwilling to take what Lee Wong held towards her. Then she saw the English stamp. In her eagerness she forgot to thank Lee Wong for the great and almost unbelievable treasure he had brought. But they saw her face light—and they saw her hand tremble.

Feng Me-lah got up, saying to the two men, "Come, let us look for a luck-shaped melon," and they obeyed and followed her.

But they did not go as far as the melon wall. They went aimlessly and slowly.

Feng Me-lah and Lee Wong chatted as they strolled, but Thorn close beside them heard nothing they said. He was thinking hard.

Only very great influence could have got that letter through; great power, but whose? Why?

And at least one English mail-bag had fallen into Chinese hands.

Feng Me-lah could not have compassed this. In some way she had learned that they were in that hovel of Shing Kan's. In some way she had managed to get them here and to have them held here as welcomed

guests. He had come to have no doubt of that. Unless Lee Wong himself had saved them. John Thorn's teeth caught his lip. No, Lee Wong would not have had him brought and welcomed as well. It had been Feng Me-lah. But she had not done this. This had been great power—enormous. Greater than Lee T'ing's, who would not have done it if he could, greater than Feng Yu's; though Feng Yu might have had the generosity. Whose power was it? Why? What wouldn't he give to know!

When Feng Me-lah thought they had left Miss Kent undisturbed long enough, they turned and went back.

Elizabeth sat where they had left her. She had put her letter away. She was not holding it.

"Did you find a luck-shaped melon?" she asked Feng Me-lah.

"No. But perhaps we find it to-morrow. We'll have a good search, you and I, when to-morrow come."

Elizabeth smiled, nodded a little.

But somehow John Thorn did not like her smile. It had not been light in the Pewter Lane hovel of Shing Kan's splendid, generous hospitality; but for all that, he believed that he had learned to know Elizabeth's face as well as her voice in that dark little room with his peculiarly cramped, private attic-hole up over it. He hoped she had not had bad news; her brother in South Africa or anything. She had enough here.

After a few moments Lee Wong went to the Flowery to see his sisters and Feng Me-lah went with him.

Elizabeth was very quiet.

Somehow, John did not like to speak. And he bit back the question he longed to ask.

The English girl's odd gray-green eyes were across the lotus-tank, looking far into space.

She did not turn them, nor move at all, when after

some time she said, "Feng Me-lah need not give me any Kitchen-gods. I shall have no place to put them, even if we ever do get out of all this. I have got my wish, Mr. Thorn. The Beeches is burned to the ground."

CHAPTER XXXVII

JOHAN THORN never quite knew why he felt so sorry for Elizabeth Kent when she told him that her old Surrey home was gone forever. But even in the welter of their Peking tragedy it took him by the throat and shook him hard.

Compared to what they and every European here were suffering, it was so small a thing that it was almost a veritable nothing. Yet he knew that it had moved the queer little English girl tremendously. She had said several weeks before that she wished it. Perhaps she felt that in wishing it she had dealt the old house an unfilial blow, and in some uncanny way herself had destroyed it. Such things, as they both knew, never were true. But you came to half feel that they were, out here in China. She felt that she had done the dear old home she so loved a treachery. That was part of it. But he suspected that, consciously or unconsciously, she had dreamed of living herself at The Beeches again.

He had dreamed it for her, too, in the watches of their comradeship in Pewter Lane; had gone so far as to wonder how it could be brought about. Hugh Lester was off the map. The unmistakable honesty of her mirth at his blundering surmise concerning Lester had told him that. But there were other men in Eng-

land, not good enough for this plucky girl who went through all this without a whimper, but men good enough to give her happiness and to snatch at theirs in her, to realize how wonderful she was, to feel her charm and see and crave her loveliness.

Well, neither her dream, if she had dreamed it, nor that selfsame dream of his for her, could ever come true now—not The Beeches part of it.

Of course, she had not wished that the old house might be destroyed. And now that it had been she was hurt.

"I shall never have a home again," she had said drearily. "If we ever get away from China, I shan't even want one—not after The Beeches."

That had been a mighty foolish thing to say. But he saw she meant it. It showed him how much more unstrung she was than he had suspected. Well, not much wonder. He felt pretty unnerved himself every minute of the time. Hearing the bullets spit-spat over Legation Street way, and wondering what had happened to Aunt Hilda and what Aunt Hilda thought had happened to him, kept him unstrung. What must it be to a girl—little delicate thing like Elizabeth!

He'd give that old quarter-section to be able to make her feel all right. But he didn't even know what to say, and as for doing, there was exactly nothing to do.

And while he sat and tried to think what to say to her, she turned and said something that pleased him so that it almost cheered him up—did cheer him for several hours and cheered him more than he knew.

"Please don't tell Me-lah or anyone here. I love her. I can't help it. It isn't her fault that she is Chinese, and she has been an angel to us. But I want to keep The Beeches just to myself."

And she had let him into The Beeches with her!
Yes, John Thorn was pleased.

Why they were here, how Feng Me-lah had discovered their gruesome hiding-place, even the deeper mystery of how Lee Wong had been able to get hold of Elizabeth's English letter and deliver it to her—all that so puzzled Thorn was simple enough; simple though certainly strange.

This was how it had happened.

Keeping his promise to T'zǔ Hsi, Feng Yu had unearthed every crevice and corner of Pewter Lane; he and his spies had gone all through it, lest anything lurk there that might break into or, even by a stray shot, fire the sacred birthplace. He had discovered that Shing Kan was hiding some one or more in an unused part of her brother's house. He had caught her red-handed in the courtyard with food—food that at this time and in that quarter amounted to European delicacies. Then he had remembered the *amah* herself and had guessed the rest. A Manchu boy, who had slipped out from the hotel to a part of Peking he liked better when the crash came, was now in Feng's service and had reported that the niece of the long English lady and the nephew of the rich fat other lady had been missing when their aunts were forced to go into the British Legation House, and what a fuss there had been about it.

Feng Yu had promised Shing Kan not only possible pardon but probable safety for herself and for Miss Kent and Thorn, if she obeyed him minutely; had promised her to roast the three of them alive, if she did not; and the rest had been easy as far as Shing Kan was concerned. She had wept much and confessed.

Feng Yu would have hanged himself before he would have carried out his threat. But the peasant woman was not to know that.

He left the three where they were, guarded to his full satisfaction, but without the two in the hovel knowing anything about it, and with Shing Kan cut off from access to the hovel until he himself gave it to her, and he went to the Palace.

His own access to the Empress Dowager was immediate. She received him eagerly.

He was surprised to find Feng Me-lah with Her Majesty. It was T'zū Hsi herself who had advised that Feng Me-lah would be safest with Lee T'ing's daughters at Lee T'ing's *chia* until Peking was tranquil again. Advice from the Old Buddha was command. But Feng Yu had been glad to have it so arranged. He was hated by the Plum Blossom Fists. Only the Empress Dowager's own word had kept his house unattacked so far. Lee T'ing was of them, one of their "Spiritual Souls," the band of educated, high-born Chinese and Manchus who clung to the Secret Society's old ideals—the fine ideals of its long-ago birthtime in Shangtung—and saw in the Boxers' present outbreak China's best chance of ridding herself of the hated European yoke, of the impertinent and harmful European encroachments.

Lee T'ing and Feng Yu were firm friends still, firm friends in spite of the one grave difference between them. For each knew that the other was sincere and not self-seeking.

Feng Yu went to see Feng Me-lah at the Lee home as often as he could. He was always welcome there.

He found them in her Majesty's favorite pavilion, in her painting-room.

Feng Me-lah, looking flushed and anxious, was

seated with a stretched silk on her lap, a brush in her hand. The Dowager sat beside her.

What a woman! What a woman! Peking was a shambles, and the Empress of all China was giving a girl a painting lesson!

Feng Yu fell on his face and crawled towards T'zŭ Hsi.

"Get up," the Old Buddha commanded him. "Sit."

Feng Me-lah saw her father and made to rise. "Sit still, girl," she instantly was ordered. "Your venerable father will pardon your disrespect since it is mine."

Feng Yu smiled into his daughter's eyes and bent to their Empress as low as he could without falling off his stool.

"Speak!" he was told. "Paint on, Green Pearl. Slowly. Make great care. Well, Feng Yu? Say it all. We can trust the daughter of Feng Ch'in Hsien."

For an instant Feng thought to beg that Feng Me-lah might withdraw. Then he saw what an ally his Green Pearl might prove. And of a truth they could trust her.

"All is safe, Your Majesty," he began, and told all he had done, all he had found, the safety of the house in which T'zŭ Hsi's mother had died, the house in which T'zŭ Hsi had been born. Yes, the old plum tree still grew on the hill. He reported the precautions he had taken for the future. Wherever the Patriotic Harmonies pushed their slaughter and their fires they would not again approach Pewter Lane. He had cleared the quarter out. His own banner men surrounded it. The sacred house was specially guarded.

"I have been worse served. I wish you had brought me a spray of the old plum tree, Feng Yu. Jung Lu and I made our play under it when we were little chil-

dren. You were dolt not to have brought to me a spray of the old plum tree."

"Holy Mother, I had the thought. But thy unworthy worm would not lay his diseased hands on that eminent tree without Your Majesty's perfumed command. There is yet another word I crave to lay at your jeweled feet, Greatest One." Feng Yu spoke slowly. He let just a thread of anxiety quiver into his voice, and because he did, he contrived to catch for the fraction of an instant his daughter's eye which had been his object.

And Feng Me-lah knew that she was going to be called to his aid, and now. She had no idea how. But she had no fear that she should not understand when the moment came. She bent her head a little lower over her silk and brushed with exquisite care.

"The child improves, Feng Yu. I may teach you to paint with less disgrace, chit. Gray for that leaf," she pointed it with a nail-protector. "Well, Feng Yu, your yet another word? Speak."

"I have left, locked, guarded fast, three in a rude place I found them, until I gained your command of them, Holy Mother."

"You have dealt with all else you found in Pewter Lane without troubling me myself, Feng Yu. Why not these three? Who are they, since you lacked the wit to deal with them?"

"One is a peasant-one, a woman. I should have dismissed her with a gold piece, or have bidden her to Feng Me-lah's service—for I know her, Great Wisdom—had I found only her. She had imprisoned in her hovel two others, a man and a woman. They are barbarians."

Feng Me-lah was painting with special care. The brush just touched the silk. Her little hand scarcely

seemed to move. Only the flash-flash of her rings showed that it did.

"Of such importance that you could not decide without my wisdom added to your own whether to slice them slowly or to leave them locked there to starve?"

"They are of no importance, Imperial Mother. Of less than none, except to Feng Yu thy worm. I crave them for my own prisoners."

Feng Yu had slipped from his stool. He lay on the carpet, his face to it at the Old Buddha's shoe.

"You had them your prisoners. Was not that enough?"

"Loyalty commanded me to crave them of your Imperial Majesty."

"That you may move them to a softer prison! You are traitor, Feng Yu!" T'zŭ Hsi scoffed at him. "You would shield them!"

Still the girl painted on—very slowly, very softly.

"I would shield them, Gracious Presence, because my debt to each is great. But I would not shield them without your consent."

T'zŭ Hsi liked the man's answer, but she tried to hide her liking.

"Bring me wine, girl," she ordered harshly. "My throat is dry with rage."

Feng Me-lah laid the silk down softly and went to the casement where a great ewer and a cup stood. Both were pure gold, and both were exquisite of shape and embossing.

T'zŭ Hsi took the cup and sipped a little of the wine, handed back the cup, still almost brimful, but gestured Feng Me-lah to wait.

"Since you have condescended to confide me so much, speak now the rest. Twist no more about the bamboos! Who are they?"

"The man, Your Majesty, is a mere traveler——"

"From the America? More care, girl. Your hand trembled; all but you spilled a little the wine. Go put the cup back where it stood, since you cannot hold it as my cupbearer should." Feng Me-lah obeyed. Those who served her obeyed T'zū Hsi without expostulation or delay. "Return." The girl came back and stood meekly before the Old Buddha. "Shame on you, Feng Me-lah, that your hand shakes at the thought of a man. Ten thousand shames on you that your fingers quiver at the thought of a barbarian devil."

Feng Me-lah lifted her eyes to her mistress' face and smiled—scarcely a smile, but it was a smile.

"How dare you smile at me, chit?" The Dowager's voice spoke a terrible threat, she thrashed her knee with her fan.

"You have taught me to, Madam. You have taught Feng Me-lah not to fear you again."

Feng Yu's heart stood still.

The old eyes that looked so young held the girl's soft eyes in twin vices of cold steel. The girl's eyes did not flinch. The woman's face kept its sternness, but the old eyes that looked so young suddenly twinkled.

"Go back to your stool, Feng Yu. You have sprawled on the carpet long enough. Sit. The child will manage this loyal request of yours better than you. Why did your hand shake as you held my wine-cup, Feng Me-lah?"

"Surprise shook me, Great One."

"That I knew what barbarian the venerable Feng Yu sought to defend?"

"Holy Old One, yes."

"Had you yourself guessed it?"

"Sacred Mother, yes."

"When?"

"When my eminent father said that they were barbarians, I hoped it. When he spoke 'mere travel-one,' I knew. I think I knew at the self-moment Your Majesty did."

"Our minds leapt at the one leap! All the gods on-high, you take great liberties to-day, girl."

Feng Me-lah hung her head, abashed at last.

And T'zŭ Hsi laughed. "Chut, child, since I myself have taught you not to fear me again, forget not the lesson ever. Be not afraid, Green Pearl. I grow old, and it gives me good content that in all China there is one whom I cannot make afraid."

The girl looked up, and what her face said must have thanked T'zŭ Hsi adequately. "Thy slave," she said, "did not mean or think, Great Mistress, that our knowing was the same. I only knew because I had cause to know. You, Divine Mother, divined."

"Nay, little pearl-one, I did not divine. I have not that gift. If I had it, I should not keep about me a grasping horde of diviners who lead me awrong as often as they lead me aright. And, if I had it, I should not fritter it on things of pettiness—not on a barbarian with a dishonorable prick-name. I knew. I knew that there could be but one barbarian for whom Feng Yu would risk my anger as he has risked it but now. I know that a night long you stayed alone on a Western hill and that he cared for you and did not forget that you were a flower. If it was fault, the fault was mine, since, when the White woman asked it, I counseled Feng Yu to permit you go to the temple with them. I did not understand that even women of Europe would so neglect a girl-one entrusted to them; would let her be lost into peril. Their man did

better than they. Would to all the gods it were they shut tight in the hovel. But perhaps they do well enough on Legation Street! Gods! that you were alone with no better care than that of a despicable thorn-worm!"

"He is a White gentleman!" Feng Yu said impulsively from his stool. "I know no greater gentleman."

"Who bade you speak?" The reprimand was sharp and quick.

"My Chinese heart, Your Majesty, and justice and gratitude."

The Old Buddha ignored him. That she did no worse was approval of his reply.

"Shall I give him into your custody, Feng Me-lah? What will you do with him if I do?"

"My hands are but weak and a girl's, Sacred Majesty. Should it graciously please you to grant me his custody and grant me your royal permission to use it as I choose, I would ask my honorable father to guard him for me."

"What is he to your heart, Feng Me-lah, this Western man?"

"One who was kind to me, gave me his coat when the night grew bitterly cold on the Western Hills, who always has given me the respect my father would have wished."

"No more than that, Feng Me-lah?"

"Not more by the weight of a hair," the Manchu girl answered a little coldly.

"We live in strange days, Green Pearl. The Year of the Rat torments us, indeed. We may be driven to desperate sacrifices before the cold Pepper Month comes. If it came that Feng Yu, to do so commanded by me, gave you in marriage to this barbarian man with

the sharp name, would you drink the red-tied marriage cup with him contentedly?"

Feng Me-lah drew up all her young height to its full, and her eyes flashed contemptuously into the Old Buddha's. "I would slay myself first, Your Majesty."

"Why?"

"Because he is not of our race."

The old eyes gleamed, then she swung them to the man.

"Will you keep him close, and harmless to our cause, Feng Yu, if I lend him to the girl or to you?"

"With my life, Holy Mother," Feng Yu rose to gesture the oath.

"Who is the woman with him, Feng Yu?"

"A young English-one. It pleased Your Majesty once to receive her into your very presence."

"The niece-one of the careless Englishwoman who let our Green Pearl stray into peril, and when she had, punished her for it insolently! Yes, I have been well-informed, child. Take then the man, Feng Yu. I lend him to you. Keep in your ear that I lend but do not give. But we will not spare the girl-one of the English woman who neglected, and after neglect dealt insolence to a Manchu maiden of rank. The English girl-one must suffer."

"Mother!" The cry rang through the pavilion as Feng Me-lah threw herself at the Empress Dowager's feet.

Feng Yu trembled. No one, not even the Princess Imperial, was privileged to call Her Majesty that without ceremonial prefix. Feng Yu trembled and was sore afraid, but the woman's heart leapt.

Feng Me-lah did not *ko'tow*. She knelt with her

hands clasped high, and she looked full in T'zǔ Hsi's face.

"She bathed my feet when they were bruised and swollen. She rebuked those who slighted me. She made them ashamed. She has a look of Your Venerable Majesty. Once your own hand gave her a rose."

"I have done many foolish things, child," the Old Buddha said whimsically and a little sadly. "She bathed your feet," she repeated softly. "We have squandered our time too long. We will paint no more to-day. But we will paint again, you and I, Green Pearl. Go you back now to the house of Lee T'ing. See that no word escapes you that should not, to him or to her; for it is there that they will be safest—the house of Lee T'ing. Tell him it is my order that your guests are given Chinese courtesy. I lend them to you, Feng Me-lah—under your father's custody, since you wish it. Back to Pewter Lane, Feng Yu. Bring me when next you come a spray of the old plum tree. Take this bold, exigent one's prisoners to her. She has bearded the Empress of China well to-day. I make no doubt she will stow them soft; see you that they are stowed safe and secure. Take the 'White gentleman' as you will, in narrow chair or in wide, jolted on a wheelbarrow or slung and swung in a sack; but rage of Yehonala upon you if you do not carry with care and at her ease the White girl who bathed Feng Me-lah's feet when they were tired and sore."

And that is the simple explanation of why John and Elizabeth journeyed from the house in Pewter Lane to the palace-house of Lee T'ing.

And why Elizabeth's letter reached her is much of a sameness.

When they had left her T'zŭ Hsi sat brooding alone over many things. She remembered that it was to-day long, long ago that she first had been carried a half-frightened child into the Forbidden City.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE nightmare passed. It always does. The Legations were relieved. And London was free to think and to talk of nothing but the Boer War once more.

But the Peking horror left its scars. People forgot. Legations danced and gambled mildly in their old indifferent way. But history was gashed, and Peking can never be Peking again. The Temple of Heaven still stands, but it has lost its rites. Marco Polo's bridge still spans the Hun River near Lu Ko Ch'iao village. The old Fox Tower is there on the Tartar Wall, but the ghost has fled. The Manchu has gone. Old customs are low in the dust. The soul of Peking is dead—or in trance.

Reparations were paid, on both sides; China's then and there; ours since—and to come; reparations of sorts.

If only reparations could repair! But they never can. Human life taken cannot be given back; human hearts and minds crushed and maimed at best can only be mended and patched, never can be made whole again.

There is no reparation for loot.

The flower that has been plucked never again can grow in the grass.

The old astronomical instruments that famous Ver-

biest, the scholarly Jesuit, designed for quick-skilled Chinese craftsmen to make have returned from the German mudbaths of Potsdam and have been replaced on the Tartar Wall. But the tiled sheds of the old Examination Halls have gone forever.

No Treaty of Versailles can call the Han-lins back to make China again the one mighty Empire in which the pen *was* mightier than the sword! The bamboo still mirrors in cool liquid green the day-star of summer on its polished pointed leaves; still slithers the snow of North China winter from its sword-like leaves; still grows the loveliest of all Earth's evergreens, at once the most beautiful and the most useful thing in China. The silver pines still grow on the Western Hills and in the despoiled Forbidden City. But the courtyards are silent, the table-lute is broken, there are cobwebs on the old Imperial sundials, Heaven's Well is empty, the gourds are rotting in the gardens of T'zū Hsi, the water-clocks drip the hours there are none to mark. The Dragon Throne is empty. The Vermilion Pencil writes no more. The wistaria is stricken on the dusty, godless temples' walls. Kwan Yin-ko is stricken! The spirit of Confucius is passing from his people. Li Po sings no more in the guest-house or by the silver river, his wine-cup is spilled and emptied.

For eight gruelling weeks in a summer hot even for Peking the Legations held out in hell on earth. Then the Campbells came.

The Campbells that had been coming so long, actually came. They came with British officers leading their Indians. The Rajputs got there first, the Sikhs close behind, American infantry next and then a British battery lurched and rammed its way in; pell-mell

the others followed—worn, dusty, sick with sweat, calling, cursing for water.

The Siege of Legation Street was over.

It was then that Hilda Van Vleck went to pieces.

It was then that Joan, Duchess of Charnley, came into her own. She was very English then, calm—outwardly at least—and unemotional, easily as dignified and unembarrassed as if the wrecked and filthy Legation gardens had been a Buckingham Palace Drawing Room.

But the Duchess had not spent eight weeks limp and useless. The first week of the eight her distress for her husband's certain distress, her anxiety as to his creature comforts in England undirected by her from China, her distress and anxiety concerning Elizabeth, had downed her, and she had cowered and shivered. Then race and caste had reasserted themselves, and she had taken her share in the hard activities of the siege as unflinchingly as Hilda Van Vleck had, and had borne herself every bit as bravely.

But the Duchess' contribution to the general effort and endurance was not as valuable as her friend's. The Englishwoman did her part grimly. The American woman did hers joyously. Joan did her duty, Hilda did her own pleasure. Joan Charnley set a strong example of proud, quiet endurance and of unflinching, unflagging industry. But all she gave was material. She inspired no one. For, though her self-control never broke again, the canker of fear for those dearer than self still ate at her heart and soul. Hilda Van Vleck inspired a number of others with her own buoyant courage in the hideous place and situation where it would have been no mean achievement to have inspired one. For she was not controlling herself, but was expressing herself. Opportunity had

found her at last—after more than forty fat, pampered years—and she seized it exultantly, not knowing that she had. The Duchess knew she was doing her best. Hilda Van Vleck was too busy doing it, and doing it too joyously, to think anything about it.

The last half of the siege had been worse than the first half, in every way but one; increasing heat, increasing stench, hope long deferred. But morale had improved, some sort of discipline had grown and hardened out of chaos. As the days passed and their situation grew more desperate, men grew calmer and more determined; defense had stiffened. And the British spirit of dogged determination still lived, still held.

When the famous gift of fruit and lettuce came from the Empress Dowager they knew that something special was up. They searched and tested it first for poison, and when it proved only refreshing and health-giving, they believed that the pendulum was swinging at last, and the old diplomatic hands there, who knew China and T'zū Hsi, believed it most convincingly. T'zū Hsi was frightened!

Feng Me-lah, knowing of Her Majesty's gift, also believed that the pendulum was swinging. She had pleaded that with the gift of vegetables a line might go, even a word to the English duchess to tell that Elizabeth and Mr. Thorn were safe and well, safe as far as there was safety here now. But T'zū Hsi forbade it, and Feng Me-lah would not have disobeyed even if she could. Was Her Majesty holding them in pawn for some desperate future need?

With the imperial lettuce went a gracious message of the Empress Dowager's grief at the intolerable inconvenience and worse to which those she esteemed had been put by the excited Boxers whom she had been un-

able to control, but was striving to, and undoubtedly should be able to before long. In the meantime she hoped they would enjoy her lettuces and melons.

The pendulum had not swung far, if it had swung. Firing and attack continued. Defense did not slacken.

The gruelling days grew hotter.

But August came, and when its second week fainted and died in its own intolerable heat the Duchess of Charnley stood quietly watching an English subaltern lead his orderly Indians into the British Compound, and Hilda Van Vleck sobbed aloud as the dusty, khakied American soldiers pelted stumblingly in.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE Legations had been relieved.

The Old Buddha fled—for a time, on a long tour of inspection.

And Civilization broke loose over Peking.

It was loot, loot all the way from the Temple of Heaven to Ah Ting Mên.

The vandalism, our wanton destruction of what we could neither steal nor carry, was fouler than the loot.

But when the Western soldiers smashed into the Forbidden City "to rend T'zŭ Hsi limb from limb" they did not find her. The Old Buddha had outwitted us again. She was not there.

Suspecting (or divining?) her Holy Mother's purpose, Feng Me-lah, though she knew it forbidden, followed only by Shing Kan, slipped from the house of Lee T'ing and made her way to the Palace.

She was only in time. Already the carts waited,

and T'zŭ Hsi reached them as Feng Me-lah did.

The Empress did not reproach her. Perhaps she was glad to have the one human creature she loved deeply and unselfishly near her for a moment now. She laid her hand on the girl's arm.

"What think you of your Empress, Yehonala the Manchu, masquerading as a Chinese peasant?" she demanded.

Feng Me-lah was too choked to answer.

"I shall return, girl. Keep you safe in the house of Lee T'ing till the storm-time is past. Pray to Kwan to guard and prosper me. Your Empress will beseech Kwan to guard you, little Green Pearl. Time presses. While I am afar forget not what now I say to you. This darkness will pass. Had I yielded to Feng Yu, it would not have been. He shall help me to retrieve it. Obey him in all things. There must be great readjustments in China, Feng Me-lah. See, Lee Wong waits to assist me into the cart. I take him with me to the first stage of our journey. Then it may be I shall bid him return to Peking, perhaps at the snow-time, perhaps sooner. You will see Lee Wong again before you see the Old Buddha. When you see him remember he comes to you from me. From boyhood he has served me loyally. I have promised him great reward. I intend he himself shall choose it. There are old barriers that must go down now, girl. We who are Manchu must hold less aloof from the Chinese, even in marriage, I think. Shrink not from my eyes, Feng Me-lah. And shrink not from your own heart when it wakens. My eyes try not to read it, Green Pearl. If it sleeps, T'zŭ Hsi would not wake it. But her eyes have read the heart of Lee Wong. You see me clad as a Chinese woman. Remember it.

If some day I find you clad as a Chinese woman, but more softly than these, it will not vex me, Feng Melah." She moved.

"Mother," the girl sobbed, "take me with you."

The fleeing woman's voice almost broke as she answered, "Were the way softer, child of my heart, that I would do. I will send you word of my welfare by Lee Wong. I leave you with Kwan."

The rude peasant carts creaked off towards the Shen Wu Mên and passed through it as the Hour-of-the-Tiger hid Peking in its gray.

The Boxers—fleeing, too, now—had slaughtered. Their revenge and their maniacal fury had been insatiable. We took our revenge. It was other than theirs. We disfigured Earth's most wonderful Palace. We slashed and tore beauty centuries old from our world's most eloquent capital. We made Revenge ours and ourselves its demons. We punished treasures of art and of architecture for the crimes of a mob-uprising whose mobsmen believed themselves justified and patriots.

We sacked Peking.

And we polluted Peking. Chinese women threw themselves into lakes and canals to escape Western soldiers. Most of it cannot be told.

It happened in Peking. Civilized Christendom did it.

The Duchess and her niece, Mrs. Van Vleck and John Thorn went on to Japan.

When the great relief came it did not occur to any one of them that they would not leave Asia at once.

But the Duke of Charnley frustrated them. He cabled his wife that he was on his way to her. There

was nothing for her to do but wait for him. His cable told neither his boat nor his route. "Just like Bill," she fumed with a lump in her throat. She had no way of intercepting him with a T'zū-Hsi-like command to meet her in Colombo or at Vancouver. For the first time since her wedding day she had to keep her marriage vow of obedience.

Mrs. Van Vleck, changing her mind at the last moment, decided to stay with Joan until the Duke came. Then she and John would get back home as soon as they possibly could.

So the four went to Tokio.

And John Thorn and Elizabeth Kent forbore to say what they thought of the arrangement and of the delay.

CHAPTER XL

PEKING wore her stinging robe of Siberian cold. Peking wore her imperial ermine of December snow proudly; but she was manacled in ice, and the bitter, brutal cold winds lashed her. Even Chinese hurried through the streets as rapidly as they could, smothered in padded garments, those who had them smothered in furs, all snugly clothed up to their eyes. It was six-coat weather, if ever weather was. Everyone carried a hand-stove closely clasped to stomach or breast. Those who could stayed at home. The moat was frozen. The European women made much of their teapots and of the hot cakes of afternoon tea. Hot drinks pressed "pegs" hard for pride-of-place at the Club. But the English skated. Till

Gabriel blows his trump, and probably long after, put the English where you will and how you may, they will have their sports.

It was bitter winter weather. In Peking the cold of winter always is bitter. But this year a winter of unusually intense cold had followed the gruelling summer of unusually intense heat.

Cold as Peking invariably is in midwinter, usually its snowfalls are light. They were heavy this winter. Peking looked like a city of ermine. And it seemed to wear a pall, as if On-High had opened to sheet Peking in the color of Chinese mourning for the absence of T'zū Hsi.

Beyond the Walls the millet was frozen stubble; hoarfrost lay crisp on the cotton fields. In the Purple Palace grounds snow caked the carvings of the great symbolic columns, hid the Spirit Stairway, caked the sundials and the incense-burners and blanketed the Dogs of Fo.

It was not snowing now. The sun had come, and it stayed. But the sky kept its cloudless turquoise that, summer and winter, is Peking's peculiar charm and certainly is her most constant natural loveliness.

Nowhere had the snow melted. But from the sloping, yellow, smooth-tiled roofs of the Forbidden City it had slithered as it fell. The sacrosanct, Imperial color of the Manchus shone triumphant between the snow-covered earth and the unblemished blue of the sky.

The cold gnawed to the very bones of Europeans and of Chinese who ventured or were driven by business or daily necessity out from houses or shops. But it hid the wounds of August. Most of Peking's hideous external wreckage was hidden under the white velvet pall of her snow. And headless bodies and body-

less heads were hidden, too, where they had fallen all through eight fiend-ridden weeks. There had been no time to bury or scavenge all of them; there had been no one interested to gather and coffin many of them. A corpse is inestimably sacred to a Chinese, if it belongs to him. But where in the Book of Rites, where in the Edicts of the Sages are you enjoined to adopt or care for other men's corpses? Unless they have been great benefactors, almost canonized, you cannot worship other people's ancestors. It would be an impertinence. Besides that, it would be perfectly useless. None but a man's own descendants can benefit his departed soul. No one knew who most of the butchered were. Whole households had perished. And not long after their slaughter who could have identified them! The August sun quickly had obliterated individuality and feature from their faces and flesh. And when Winter a little loosened her grip and Spring came back to Peking, Chinese children would play with human skulls for many a moon in alleys and streets.

The Jade Canal no longer ran, as it literally had, red with human blood. The Jade Canal was sheeted in ice and snow, clotted and halted in ice at the ice-covered grill of the Water Gate.

The cold was indescribable. Even in six-coated Peking it was almost unendurable.

But it was summer-warm in the smallest of Feng Yu's *k'o-tangs*: Feng Me-lah's own *k'o-tang*.

Three great braziers stuffed with charcoal burned bright. They were half man-tall. One was burnished brass, two were brass-lined soapstone beautifully pierced. The score of unlit tasseled lantern-lamps that hung on silver chains from the carved ceiling caught and reflected the daylight that flamed and quivered there.

A tub of lusty crimson carnations that grew as tall as the glowing braziers spiced the room as sweet as Feng Me-lah's own garden in the fragrant Lotus Month.

The great Maracanda rug on the inlaid floor was inches thick.

Feng Me-lah sat on a deep window-ledge looking out at the snow-white garden, almost lovelier in its frosted ermine than it had been in May. And *Shih lin*, the Magnolia Month, is maddeningly lovely in Peking.

The girl was not wearing her high-lifted Manchu shoes to-day but swung her feet, more simply clad in Chinese shoes, against the bird-cage now and then to make the linnet sing. Manchu women often are shod so in their indoor ease.

The bird-cage stood on wheels, of course, the ample house-cage of the girl's pet bird, that it might be wheeled about easily at Feng Me-lah's will or at the bird's. It stood on the floor near the window now, that the girl might kick her linnet into song as often as she chose. He adored his mistress, and whenever the heel or the toe of flower-painted satin tapped against his cage he lifted a proud little throat and broke into glorious song, happy to sing, grateful that Feng Me-lah cared to hear him, grateful that he knew how to obey her.

The two tiny dogs that Elizabeth Kent had loved lay unhealthfully close to a brazier. When Feng Me-lah chanced to turn her head, if she noticed them, they'd have to beat a hasty retreat of several feet. In the meantime they wallowed in happiness and preposterous heat. It was sinful that the exquisite, costly creatures should so imperil their health and beauty. They were small, but considerably larger than rats. The actual

sleeve-dog was passing from China. Whatever life sometimes made her to men, the Old Buddha always was tenderly merciful to all animals. And she had decreed that no longer should sleeve-dogs be bred in her kennels; for their birth was unavoidably cruel.

If the sack of Peking had made Feng Yu somewhat poorer, it had not impoverished him. Such fortunes as his are not easily destroyed. (One Wall Street panic does not devastate the wide belt of wheat and of corn that stretches in living gold from Illinois to the foothills of the Rockies.) Feng Me-lah was sumptuously casketed in all her apartments.

In this *k'o-tang* of hers the furniture was made of ivory, some of it beautifully painted, some of it unbelievably inlaid, some of it only very beautifully carved.

They four, the dogs and the bird and the Manchu girl, were not alone.

Lee Wong stood near the window. He was not looking through it; he was looking at Feng Me-lah. He could see a snow-covered garden, or street or landscape every day in the snow-thick Poppy Month that had followed Chihli's almost hottest summer. He could see Feng Me-lah only when she and Kwan Yin-ko chose to grant it.

"Older-than-me, how the cold bites the world to-day! Here in my comfort I freeze for the babies who have to journey about on their labor. I find you brave to have made your coming here in this cruel cold-time."

"She sent me," Lee Wong reminded her. "And I craved it. I must have fallen at Her Majesty's feet and begged it, had she not commanded it soon. Brave! I was coming to supplicate that you would grant your worm to crawl across your carpet to your feet. It warmed me, Feng Me-lah, all the way. When sum-

mer is in a man's heart he does not need six coats to warm him as he hastens through the cold mountain passes to the Jade Garden of happiness. I was not cold, eminent maiden. All of Lee Wong's despicable being was eagerness and fire. Only once before has she sent me back to Peking on her fragrant Dragon business since we left the Forbidden City. Only once has Lee Wong had speech of you since he walked beside her rude cart through the Shen Wu Mên. The blood of my heart must have burst through my aching veins and stained my misery at our Old Buddha's feet, had she not sent me now. My soul was throbbing to come back—to Peking."

Feng Me-lah held her eyes to the garden.

"Tell me of her again, Lee Wong. Tell me again that she is well—that the Holy Mother is not soaked in unhappiness."

"Her Majesty," Lee Wong said obediently, "is in perfumed health. Long years of puissant reign stretch before her, I hold it sure. There were hardships at first, as I owned it to you, when we made our way from Shen Wu to Hsuan-hua. But they did not scratch her. She caught enjoyment from it all. There are no hardships now. She journeys imperially, and when she tarries she is housed imperially. When the last adjustment has been made here in her capital, Yehonala will return to Huang Chi Tien."

"Would that she had let me journey with her!" the girl murmured. "It has been no gladness for Feng Me-lah. Much of each moon, as you know, my eminent father has been in absence from me. I have obeyed her, Lee Wong. I have gone in visit to the Legations ladies when they have invited me. I have given them our entertainment here. She commanded it. But it stung me like wasps in the Pear Month."

"None there has affronted you with rudeness?" Lee Wong demanded passionately.

Feng Me-lah laughed her contempt. "Not even with coldness, older-than-me Lee Wong. Already the foreign-ones have forgotten, as I think. Feng Me-lah the Manchu cannot forget so soon. Chinese who have gone on-high are not forgotten and disregarded so soon. But I have obeyed her. Always will I obey Her Sacred Majesty. Make for me my *ko'tow* to her, you who so soon are to be with her again, and tell Her Majesty that for me, Lee Wong, I entreat you."

"I will obey you, celestial maiden. Always will I obey you," the man said softly.

"Their missionaries grow rich, Lee Wong!" the girl cried out with angry passion, swinging about on her window perch and giving Lee Wong her eyes at last.

"Many of those sleek ones have done that for long years," Lee Wong said bitterly. "It is not the worst they have done."

"Now they increase it manyfold. The one whose name is Simons—you know whom I mean?"

Lee Wong made an ugly sound.

"He is millionaire now, it is said. I believe it true word. For mean cash he has bought ivories and porcelains worth gold no one could count. Chinese who were at the starve-place and Chinese who are thief-ones take to him many precious things of great value. He ask not question. But he buy for meanest price. Some he sell for much big price. Most he keep to find his opportunity to take it or to send it safely to the West where he can sell it to the even more advantage. While he save the souls of our babies, he steal our gems, our silks, our scrolls, all our lovely art-things!"

"He is a hell-worm," Lee Wong muttered.

Feng Me-lah clapped her tiny hands together in her

intense approval. "Hell-worm! Hell-worm!" she cried—almost gleefully. "Hell-worm! True-word! They all are hell-worms!"

"Not all of them," Lee Wong said gently. "Some of them are good men. And their nuns are holy women."

"The nuns! I make no talk of nuns, Lee Wong. I can see a mountain in the sunlight. The nuns give, they do not steal. They give themselves, and they are womanly. I made no talk of their nun-ones, Lee Wong!"

"Some of the others are good men," Lee Wong insisted, more generously than prudently.

Feng Me-lah shrugged a violent angry shoulder. "You give me rage, Lee Wong." Then suddenly she giggled, a lovely, impish giggle. "They made them a scandal, Lee Wong. Never did I hear it until this moon. Such things do not come to the *k'o-tang* of my honorable father. At the Legation I heard it. Even in their siege-time they talked their scandal. They whispered of the missionary Simons and the Lady Mary Norton—not nice things. Now it has come into the light. Lady Mary collects the curios, as they call it, most of them the trash ones, for she knows not a Chia Ching bowl from a Wan Li vase. The Mr. Simons he buy them for her. With all the rice-Christians that he knows he could find things she longed to have when she could not find them. He did it often. Twice she went to him at the night time, thinking that she keep it all the secret. For she and the Lady Elsie Grantham were rivals to get first many things. Some one see her go. Some one see her come. Talk! Talk! Talk then, Lee Wong. But the Lady Mary got her Ch'êng Hua wine-pot and her phoenix ewer and the missionary man got his big price."

"Do you hear," Lee Wong asked when Feng Me-lah's mirth had dwindled, "any word of our Western friends whom we loved?"

"Oftentimes," Feng Me-lah told him. "And always they ask of you."

"I am glad," Lee Wong said simply.

"Still they linger in Japan. The Duke is with them, and he would see it. I wish they might come back to us before they go to their home. Our parting was in such sadness, at such sad time. I wish they would come back to us to take our farewell in more happiness, when the violets are here again. Ee-lis-bet writes me letters that are long and beautiful. She does not forget."

"I think that she will not forget," Lee said cordially. "And Mr. Thorn will not forget. They both are sash-wearers. He is a White gentleman, Feng Me-lah. I shall serve him with my friendship always."

"I love them both," the girl said gently.

The sun was sinking. Lee Wong knew that he must go soon now.

"Feng Me-lah," he asked suddenly, "do you remember, once I told you that the barriers were down, and you denied it? The barriers between your race and mine. I was right, jade-one. Barriers are down. Her Majesty approves it. We must be but one race now, for so can we best serve China. We must be one people if we are to hold more in leash all the alien peoples who would take our land, our wealths, our very scrolls and give us for them nothing worth China's having. We are alone here. I may not whisper my soul-wish to you, sacred maiden. But you know it. You always have known it. You knew it when we played together in our childhood. You knew it when you were but a babe-one and I tossed you to make you

laugh and crow and was your slave, as I am now your slave and for all time shall be. Feng Me-lah," he slipped to his knee and laid his knotted hands on the window-ledge beside her, "do not face me with a mask. I have lain in brushwood, I have eaten bitterness. I have eaten vinegar. I can eat a dumb man's loss no longer. All our lives we have obeyed our Great One, you and I. We belong to clans dedicated to her personal service. You have said but now that always you will obey her. Only not for one thing, I will obey her while I live. Unless I can drink the red-tied wine-cup with the bride I chose years ago when I tossed her to hear her laugh and crow, never shall my lips touch its rim. Green Pearl, peach-flower-one, if she and your eminent father commanded it, would it pain you, Feng Me-lah?"

"Born-before-me Lee Wong, would it not be in better accordance with our customs of China if you gained—if you can—that command of theirs, before you attempted to learn how greatly Feng Me-lah would suffer at making the sacrifice her honorable father compelled?"

"I think that our Old Buddha would urge my prayer to great Feng Yu. She has hinted it." Lee Wong spoke softly. "Feng Yu knows my heart; we have not spoken together of it, but I believe that he knows. And he does not chide me that I dare to come to you, or forbid it. But never because of me shall a command of his or of our Sacred Mother come to you that I do not know will not distress you to hear."

Feng Me-lah laughed softly, teasingly, not unkindly. "Lord Lee Wong," she said, "the day-star goes. Your guest-tea cools in the outer *k'o-tang*. I shall not see you again until you have been again at the feet of Her Majesty. Neglect not to make for me my lowest

obeisance to her. Tell her that always Feng Me-lah will obey her—gladly.”

Lee Wong bent and touched her shoe with his forehead—only that, and left her. And their eyes did not meet again.

Feng Me-lah sat very still on the casement's broad ledge, nursing in her little jeweled hands the foot that Lee Wong had saluted.

The linnet chirped a hinting note that failed. Then the little loving thing began to sing to Feng Me-lah. He trilled a lovely ingratiating strain meltingly, another—and broke off, for she paid him no attention.

Close to the soapstone brazier two snoozing balls of silky yellow fluff continued to cook themselves.

CHAPTER XLI

“WELL! if anyone had told me I'd ever be in Peking again, I'd have said it was impossible. And if anybody had dared to tell me I'd be glad to see the terrible place again when I was back, I certainly should have flatly contradicted them! But I am. I wonder why!”

“Charm of China, lure of the East,” her nephew surmised lazily as he pushed John Brown and John Brown's sharp teeth from the toe of his patent leather shoe and rescued his handkerchief from Daniel Webster.

“Rubbish! I'm not like that, Jack, and don't you tell me I am. Lure of the East! The lure of New York will be good enough for me the rest of my life, I reckon. Goodness knows what sort of servants I'll take back with me, though. I said I was going to bring back

a boat-load of servants with me, and I am. When I say a thing I mean it. When I say I am going to do a thing, I do it."

"Why not let my wife send you over some English servants?" the Duke suggested.

"Not half original enough! Lots of folks have English servants in New York. I know several women who have French ones and two that have Italians. I wonder how Greek servants would do?"

"Extremely badly," The Duke of Charnley said briefly.

"Would they? Well, that's too bad. I want something striking and original, and I want them absolutely tip-top. If I could fill my houses from garret to basement with faultless servants, I'd be the most famous woman in New York."

"You would," Thorn agreed.

"Or anywhere else," the Duchess said with a sigh.

"Duke, can't you help me out? You have lived everywhere. What servants shall I take back to New York with me Not Japanese—that dream of love is o'er. They're smart as you make them. But after seeing them at short range—well, it isn't Japs I want. Where shall I get what I do want? They must be picturesque and they must be simply splendid servants, simply perfect servants."

"Tall order," John Thorn murmured, and the Duchess nodded her emphatic agreement.

"You be still, John. Where shall I get them, Duke?"

"Here."

"Not me! I hope I'll never see another Chinese as long as I live when once we've left Hong Kong."

"You'll see several in Singapore and a few in Colombo," the Duke reminded her gently.

"Shall we? Well, I don't want to then. I remember those eight murderous weeks every time I clap my eyes on one of them."

"You enjoyed it, Hilda."

"So I did, Jo. Part of me did. That is, I enjoyed being mad clean through, and helping to fight them every mite I could. But the other part of me suffered all right. And I shan't forget the suffering I saw about me—not in a hurry. I guess it is going to haunt me as long as I live. Don't let us talk about it. I want to enjoy my dinner, and Lady Mary's cook's the best ever. Though how I can swallow a mouthful that I know a Chinaman has cooked beats me. We ought to be starting, oughtn't we?" She glanced at her diamonded wrist. "No, not for another ten minutes. It isn't the Chinese I'm glad to see again. It is Peking. Goodness knows why."

"I am glad we came back," Thorn said quietly. "I like both of them. I like Peking and I like the Chinese."

"John Thorn!"

"I do, Aunt Hilda."

"Well, I'm ashamed of you then. Why, you just hated Peking when we came. You know you did. And that was before—what we won't talk about. What has changed you?"

"Peking—and the Chinese."

"Why Jack! How can you say so?"

"I have learned a lot since I hated China and the Chinese," Thorn said stoutly. "I believe I have grown up in Peking——"

"Well, I never! And you an American man. I thought you were a real one!"

"I hope I am. And I hope I am a more sensible one, and juster than I was when I first put foot in

China. Peking's a mighty fine city. I wish we had not battered it about so. And I take my hat off to the Chinese every time."

"John Thorn, you'll not get one cent of my money!"

"Oh, yes, I shall, if you don't blow it all," her nephew told her with a tender laugh.

"More fool me then! A lot of battering you did to Peking. I wish you had."

"No, thank God! I did none of the battering."

"And you can sit there and tell me that! I suppose you didn't mind my being shut up in that perfectly awful, scarifying siege, or mind a mite all I suffered there—me and Joan!"

"I minded it terribly. It hurt me pretty badly, Auntie Hild. It does now. It always will. But—try to forgive me—I don't blame the Chinese, not as I see it now. I blame ourselves, first for having given them a lot less than a square deal for a very long time—never having given them a square deal. We climbed over their fence and stole their apples, and they didn't like it. They woke up and went for us."

"I quite agree," the Duke said.

"And I blame us—ourselves—that we were not ready for them when they did."

"Hear! Hear!" the Duke said.

"I could shake the pair of you!"

"Do," laughed the Duke.

"I suppose you remember that they shut you up in a terrible hole and treated you shamefully: you and Elizabeth. Do you take your hat off to them for that?"

"War is war, Aunt Hilda. But they didn't do it. Shing Kan shut us up there and was mother-good to us, God bless her! And Feng Yu came along and

ished us out and treated us like the gentleman he is."

"Well, thank the Lord—we ought to go now, oughtn't we?—for one thing, you can't marry his girl!"

"Not very well," Thorn said sorrowfully.

"Yes, we should go now," the Duke said as he rose.

"There were only the four to go, not counting Brown and Webster; they were going. Miss Kent was visiting Mrs. Lee Wong.

It was the Duke who had lured them back to Peking. He had refused to go back home without seeing Kublai Khan's old capital; seeing the great Spirit-Wall, Yung Ho Kung, all that he could of the two score Mosques, the Hall of Classics, the porcelain *pai lous*; he wanted to see and explore as many of Peking's hundreds of temples as he could. He would not go home without seeing Marco Polo's Bridge. He was determined to study the great towered Wall and to study the modern Chinese Theater at what he believed its artists' present fountainhead; he wanted to collect flowers and shrubs unknown in England but apt to live there with care, and to try them out in one of his country homes. And he meant to see the white-trunked silver pines that, since they grow nowhere else, are the very signature of Imperial Chihli. He wished to look upon the old Examination Halls, the pink walls of the despoiled Purple City, to see Dusty Lane, Haymarket and twenty other streets. He wanted to see and see again all Peking, and he intended to see as much of it as he could in the few weeks at his disposal.

And most of all he wanted to have a talk of some importance with two men at the British Legation.

But he did not mention that except to his wife.

He had seen most of the world. He knew Shanghai

and Hong Kong well—for a Western,—but he never had been in Peking or far into Northern China. He insisted upon repairing the omission.

The Duchess had been willing enough to come with him. It made very little difference to her where she went or how, so long as she could be with her man, so long as she could shepherd and coddle the exceptionally capable, self-reliant Englishman who was perfectly able to attend to all his own needs, including boiled mutton, buttons and seasonable changes of underclothing, even without the assistance of Blake, his devoted and, in his own valet-line, beautifully gifted manservant.

Mrs. Van Vleck—again at the last minute—had made up her mind to “go along with Joan,” and John Thorn had urged no objection, whatever he felt, perhaps because he knew that after this his aunt would not change her mind again. She and her old schoolmate were going to part at Colombo. The Duke and his wife were going on to Calcutta; Mrs. Van Vleck and her nephew were going back to New York. That was definitely fixed.

That parting would hurt. The Duchess winced every time she thought of it. Hilda Van Vleck dreaded it even more; Joan had her man; she was going back to considerable loneliness. She did not want to live in Chicago; such interests as she had—bar Jack—were all in Manhattan. Whatever New England thought, John Thorn knew that Chicago, Illinois, was the hub of creation. She could not hope to transplant Jack to New York. And Jack, dearly as she loved him, was only a nephew. And of course he would marry some day, and then he wouldn't be even a nephew—less than half a nephew perhaps; it all depended. But Joan was her girlhood. Yes, the part-

ing would hurt. John almost realized how much it would hurt. Perhaps that was why he had raised no objection to their return to Peking with the Charnleys, to still a little longer absence from his real estate interests and from Chicago.

They had found Legation Street surprisingly as it had been. The men had taken out again their old easy, quiet manners and their evening clothes. The women were quite as they had been. Lady Mary Norton still played hard, still saw a good deal of Mr. Samuel Simons; Lady Elsie Grantham still collected mutton-fat jade; Mrs. Morgan still hungered, thirsted, planned and schemed to be received as nearly *en famille* as possible by the Empress Dowager when the terrible old woman came back, if she ever did.

"I very much regret," the Duke told Lee Me-lah, "having missed your father. I hope that we may run across each other in London, though. I had the pleasure of meeting him in Vienna years ago. Now that he is again accredited to a European Court, I trust that I may have the pleasure of renewing his acquaintance and of knowing him better."

Lee Me-lah replied prettily before she said almost excitedly, "Oh—but pardon—will the all of you give me excuse for a most short time? The *tingchai* has come to me from my husband, I think it," and ran towards the house. She had seen a servant coming towards her followed by a lightly clad, straw-sandaled man who carried in his loin-cloth, peeping out from its folds, a red envelope.

"Please do attend to him at your leisure," the Duke answered her cordially for them all and added, "May we examine this wonderful garden, Mrs. Lee Wong? I cannot hope to see its like again."

"But it is yours, Ta Jen," he was answered with the low Manchu dip.

They had been lunching with her and had only just come to the garden when the runner had shown himself on the path that led to the great gate.

"An uncommonly pretty creature," the Englishman remarked as she ran. "Just who is her husband?"

The Duchess told him and added, "He is with the Old Buddha now in Hsian-fu in Shensi. He comes and goes between here and Peking all the time."

"Why are they living here? She ought to live at her husband's father's, ought she not?"

"Yes, of course. But the Manchus are not so strict as the Chinese. The Fengs are Manchus, though the Lees are Chinese. When Feng Yu was sent to Europe again, he asked them to live here, and Lee Wong's father was willing."

"I wish I'd been at their wedding," Mrs. Van Vleck said regretfully. "It must have been a picture!"

"So do I!" the Duke exclaimed. "She certainly is an extraordinarily pretty girl."

"My nephew thinks so," Mrs. Van Vleck purred naughtily. "My! Jack, do you remember how scared I was, up there in the hills, that you were going to try to marry her?"

"Accurately."

"Well, you were in love with her; now weren't you?"

"She is very lovable," Thorn answered. "I think a lot of Feng Me-lah!"

"The most lovable girl you ever met?" Hilda Van Vleck teased on.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not," was all the satisfaction she got out of John Thorn of Chicago.

"She is the most lovable one I have ever met," Elizabeth Kent said over her shoulder as she sauntered

off towards a little grove of silver ash trees beyond a miniature world of fragrant roses.

"May I come, too?" Thorn asked as he followed her. "They don't want me. And our two respected aunts are quite enough to do the honors of the garden to the Duke's full satisfaction until Me-lah has devoured her bright red love-letter and returns to her honorable guests. Where are you off to, Miss Kent? May I come too?"

"If you like. I am not going anywhere in particular."

"That will suit me down to the ground, I could trail about here a long time before I got tired of Feng's garden. I shouldn't wonder if we missed all this once in a while, after we have left it half the world behind us."

"I should wonder very much if we didn't," Elizabeth answered.

The great lovely place—Feng Yu's summer palace-home—had not changed since they saw it a year ago. The old latticed stone wall kept its beauty and distinction as it had for generations; still wound its leisurely way about the princely estate. Not a blade of grass, not a fern frond was unkempt or thirsty. The proud trees kept their state, the marble-edged canal lapped its dimpled coolness between them, the shrubs wore the tinted buds of their June flowers. Heliotrope and lilies of many colors drenched the garden in sweetness, and the white hibiscus was sweeter. The geraniums were a glorious harmonious riot of color; the forget-me-nots were heavenly blue-skies come to earth on the green grass. The banyan trees had not altered. Feng Yu's park boasted three. The lovely trunks of the tall silver pines still kept their burnish. Cocks'-crests and prince's-feathers looked redder for the ice-clear water-

sprite flowers they were near. Mimosa trailed its gold in lavish profusion, the largest, sweetest, most beautiful mimosa in the world—the mimosa of Chihli. The white blossoms of wild wood jasmine, so thick that they were almost matted, gave the perfume of triple-scented tuberose. The globe-flowers burned their flaming orange. Fruit was ripe and ripening on trees and walls. The bamboo! And the maidenhair!

Behind them sprawled the great house facing south and its twenty courtyards. Before them as they went, far beyond the wall, rose the amethyst and silver-jade of the Western Hills.

They went a long way.

"All this loveliness," the English girl said softly, "would be stifling, almost choke one, if it were not so quiet—except for the birds—so exquisitely peaceful. It was not quiet in there yesterday!" She motioned back to the house. "Me-lah was doing-hospitality, as she calls it, to a horde of the European women. And it was stuffy in the *k'o-tangs* and even in the courtyards. Those lovely rooms were all stuffed with jabbering Europeans, ugly English clothes on Feng Yu's perfect chairs and benches, cocktails among the tiny cups of jasmine-tea. Bridge! Think of spending even an hour of your last weeks in China that way; Think of playing bridge and drinking Martinis and Manhattans in Feng Yu's *k'o-tang*!"

"By George! Leaves a bad taste in the mouth, doesn't it? But do you remember how we used to hate China, you and I, not so long ago, either?"

"I am ashamed to say I did."

"Not any more than I did," Thorn insisted.

"We were stupid," Elizabeth said bitterly, "and conceited."

"Just about that," John agreed. "Do you know

how I feel when I remember what I used to think of China? I feel several kinds of an idiot. Do you remember," he added as he held back a thorny vine from her face, "what a particularly poor opinion we had of each other, too?"

Elizabeth nodded. They both laughed—the girl a little shyly, the man proudly.

"You hated me more than you did China, didn't you?"

"Much more," Elizabeth replied promptly.

"I wonder why?"

Elizabeth Kent could have told him. But she only smiled non-committally and said, "So did you me!"

"Don't you believe it. Perhaps I thought I did. But I never did dislike you, Elizabeth. I know now that I didn't."

"Don't talk nonsense—if you can help it."

"I am not. I am telling you truth-words, Elizabeth-to-your-friends."

John Thorn was watching her narrowly. Nothing would have surprised him less than a cold rebuke. He had had one or two in Japan—but not very bad ones.

Again English Elizabeth did not rebuke him. But he could not catch her eyes with his.

"You deserved it," she told him stoutly. "I could kill anyone who called me Lizzie. Lizzie!"

"Even me?"

"Particularly you. It was outrageous of you to speak to me without—without the proper prefix. And we hadn't known each other a week!"

"We had known each other seventeen days."

"Had we? Not long enough for strangers to take liberties."

"We are not strangers now?"

"No," she agreed. "I wonder," she added just a

little hurriedly, "if I shall ever see this again—China, Peking?"

"I am coming here for my honeymoon," Thorn told her, "if my wife will bring me. Let's sit down here a few minutes. I want to ask you something"—Elizabeth's little face set suddenly and she went on rather less saunteringly—"about Surrey."

"Oh!" the syllable just escaped her. And she sat down carelessly on the old carved bench with Me-lah's name-flowers pushing through its stone lace-work, the bench she had sat on with Feng Me-lah when she first had been here; when she (with Shing Kan at her feet) had come here a year ago.

John dropped down beside her promptly. The old gray bench was long; there was plenty of room.

For several moments he did not ask her his question—about Surrey.

Silence contented them both. They would have been ungrateful if it had not.

It was very beautiful here. The sunlight flickered through the bamboos in gold and silver and turned the white stems of the pines into silvered mother-of-pearl. Love-birds twittered on an old persimmon tree; a turquoise bird flashed above the fern-trees. Dragon-flies were trembling films of green and gold across the rill of dimpling water. Bees were filling their velvet bellies from a thousand flowers—tiny delicate flowers that grew at the limpid, crooning rill; roses smothered the sundial and the blue porcelain moon-shaped arch that glowed beyond it. The old Manchu house lifted its tiled and lion-guarded roofs above its many courtyards and cooled its marble terraces at the willow-hung canal and beside the lotus-heavy lake. All the wonders of Feng Yu's storied gar-

dens stretched about Feng Yu's palace-home. The deep scent of flower-fragrance was intoxicating and very sweet. Fructive, laughing China looked untouched by human trouble, serene, secure, imperial.

Thorn was in no haste to speak; Elizabeth was in no haste to have him. It was utterly beautiful here, and pleasant.

When he did speak at last it was not to question her of Surrey.

"I have got a present for you, if you'll have it. You'll like the present all right. You'll want it, once you see it. But I'm not so sure you'll take even just a little thing like that from me. But you will want it!"

"How do you know?"

"I know *you*—now."

He waited for her to say, "What is it?" Most girls would. But Elizabeth would not.

"It's two," John told her.

But Elizabeth still said nothing.

"It's sleeve-dogs," he said at last, "just the sort you like. They are ducks."

The girl's pale face flamed with her delight. She did not even laugh at him until the next day.

"Oh, Mr. Thorn!" was all she said.

"They might be those two of Feng Me-lah's that you thought such a lot of. They've got a pedigree twice as long as Windsor Castle. I thought I never was going to get them—just the pair I wanted, just the ones I knew you wanted; and I wasn't going to get you any others. I've got them."

"I'm afraid you took a great deal of trouble."

"Of course I did. You wanted them."

But Elizabeth did not thank him, if that was what the man was waiting for, what he expected; unless look-

ing gravely at a ladybird and a green caterpillar crossing the path side-by-side was her way of thanking John Thorn.

But he waited so patiently for her to speak next, so seemingly contented to watch the girl's quiet face, that at last she looked up to ask, "Where are they? Let me see them, won't you?"

"Rather! To-morrow. I haven't got them in my pocket. They are with the man I bought them from—until I knew whether you'd let me give them to you."

"Thank you for them, Mr. Thorn."

John Thorn's brown hand moved towards a girl's little white hand, but Thorn drew the brown hand back sharply.

"Not yet!" he told himself.

"Tell me their names—if you can pronounce them."

"I have no idea what the midgets' names are, if they have names. Won't you name them yourself? Or you name one of them and let me name the other. How would that do?"

Miss Kent considered it.

"I will name them both," she announced. Then the girl dimpled up at him. "I name one Lizzie," she rippled, and added gravely, "the other shall be Calumet."

The brown fingers moved again, again were clenched back.

"We haven't hated each other much since that, have we, Elizabeth?"

"How could we? I couldn't. And it was my fault that you got caught out there in that courtyard and had all that bad time."

"Rubbish!" her companion said roughly. "I like to remember it. I always shall. I expect we had a better time, take it all in all, than we'd have had shut

in behind the sandbags in the White jam and welter at the Legation."

"Perhaps we did," Elizabeth owned softly.

"Lizzie is gold all over, tawny gold. Her tail is the cutest thing you ever saw."

"And you'll bring them to me to-morrow?"

"You bet I will. Calumet has white paws, for all the world like curled up baby ostrich feathers. He's got the absurdest 'spectacles' on both his eyes, and one brown-tipped ear. And I believe he looks even more impudent than Lizzie."

"He ought to," Miss Kent said demurely.

Then they both laughed.

"I have called you Elizabeth three times, and you haven't snubbed me."

"What was the use? You do as you like."

"Do I? I'd like to—Elizabeth, I was scared to death to call you so. But, don't you think we might, after those Calumet days of ours?"

"I have not the least intention of calling you Elizabeth," the girl said severely, "if that is what you mean, Mr. Thorn."

John Thorn gave her a look that sent the greenish gray-brown eyes down to the path again; but the green caterpillar and the black-and-red ladybird had gone.

"You couldn't be happy anywhere on earth except in Surrey, not for long, could you?" Thorn said it awkwardly and his voice was not altogether steady.

She did not answer him.

"Elizabeth," he blurted it hotly, still awkwardly enough, but the man's desperate voice was steady now. The brown hand was hovering very near. "Could you possibly put up with me—in Surrey?"

The hour was very still. The flowers were hushed and silent on their stalks. Only the bamboos trem-

bled a little in the human silence. The turquoise bird flew away toward the copper sunset. The love-birds had gone long ago.

Elizabeth Kent spoke presently.

"I believe that I wish not to see Surrey again," she said with a sigh, "at least not for years. It would hurt too much. I am glad that The Beeches is gone. No matter how wrong it is, I am very, very glad. But I never want to go home again. I suppose that is why it hurts to leave Peking so."

"Will you come home with me?" John Thorn whispered hoarsely. "Will you let me take you home?"

The girl neither answered nor moved.

She was very white. Thorn was even whiter.

"You know that I love you," the man cried. "You have known it ever since that time you woke—there—You must have known it. Every atom of my being has been telling you so all the time. You don't know how I love you. You can't know that—yet. But I'll show you, every hour we live, if you will let me. You do know that I love you, don't you, little Elizabeth?"

Elizabeth gave him her eyes then. Her lips trembled a little, but her shy voice was clear and steady. "I have hoped so," was all she said.

GLOSSARY

- Amah*Maid, nurse, serving-women.
- Babies*Peasants, servants.
- Bannermen*Imperial Guards, etc. Every Manchu and many Chinese and Mongols belonged to one of the Banners. A mandarin or high official had his own bannermen. The different branches of the great Banner organization had different duties and were distinguished by different colors of the uniforms they wore, and the banners they carried. There were eight Banner Corps.
- Born-before-I-was* . .Sir, Madam. The prefix of respect.
- Boxers*The general term by which most of the anti-foreign societies came to be called, especially by Europeans.
- Bright Dynasty* . .Ming Dynasty.
- Buddha's-Fingers* . .A plant that bears very decorative clusters of gourd-like "hands" or "fingers."
- Buddha's-Hand*
- Chair*A chair or seat slung or raised on poles and carried on men's shoulders.
- Cash*A small coin.
- Chia*Family residence.
- Ch'ien Mên*A gate in the South Tartar Wall. It faces the Palaces.
- Ch'in Hsien*Lute Fairy.
- Dragon Ear*The Emperor's ear. The Emperor's hearing. The Emperor's attention.

- Dragon Throne* . . . The Chinese Throne of the Manchu Dynasty. The Emperor's throne.
- Eat a dumb man's loss*. Say nothing about it. Suffer in silence.
- { *Eat bitterness* . . . } Sorrow. Disappointment.
- { *Eat vinegar* . . . } Discomfort. Humiliation.
- Face Me with a Mask*. Conceal thought with an expressionless countenance.
- Flower-Boats* . . . River boats of frail women.
- Flowery* . . . Women's apartments in a home of consequence and repute. Bride's chair.
- Flowery-Quarter* . . . Disreputable women's quarter.
- Fu* . . . A city of some consequence. It is walled and is under a magistrate.
- Golden Lilies* . . . The bound, squeezed, deformed feet of Chinese women.
- Go on-high* . . . Die.
- Great Heat* . . . Hottest period of the year.
- Great Wisdom* . . . The Empress Dowager.
- Guest Tea* . . . Ceremonial tea that bids a guest go.
- Han-lins* . . . Those who have passed the highest of the great literary examinations.
- Harmonious Fists* . . . One of the Boxer societies.
- Hata Mên* . . . A gate in the South Tartar Wall. It is East of the Water Gate.
- Heavenly Countenance* . . . The Empress Dowager.
- Heaven's Well* . . . The heart and core of the *kuei*. The court about which the women's apartments are built.
- Hsi Chih Mên* . . . A gate in the West Tartar Wall.
- Huang Chi Tien* . . . Great Palace Hall in the Forbidden City.
- Joss-man* . . . Missionary. God attendant.
- K'o-tang* . . . Guest-Hall.
- Ko'tow* . . . Prostration of great respect—flat on the ground, the forehead touching it the prescribed number of times. It is written in many ways—of which “k'o-

t'ou" probably is the most scholarly.

- Kuei* Women's apartments. In a gentleman's or rich man's home it is a building of many rooms and verandahs surrounding a courtyard.
- Kuei Jen Concubine* . An honorable person. One of the ladies who form the third of the four classes of Imperial concubines.
- Kwan Yin-ko* The Goddess of Mercy. "Hearer-of-Cries." Written in several other ways. Often called merely "Kwan."
- Lain in brushwood* . Had a tortured, distressful, sleepless time.
- Li* About one third of a mile.
- Lu Chu* Green Pearl.
- Mên* Gate.
- Old Buddha* The Empress Dowager. She was called so by her subjects in their utmost expression of affection.
- Older-than-I-am* . . Same as "born-before-I-was." Memorial arches. Sometimes merely decorative. They have no religious significance. Written in several ways.
- Pidgin* Business, etc. Chinesed English.
- P'ing Tse Mên* . . . A gate in the West Tartar Wall.
- Plum Blossom Fists* . The Boxers.
- Red Lamp Light* . . The women's Boxer society.
- Rice-time* Meal-time.
- Sash-wearers* Aristocrats.
- Shen Wu Mên* Gate of Divine Military Genius, the Northern Gate of the Forbidden City.
- Shu-chia* Reverence-books room. Library. Study.
- "Shut-in" Wives. Women who live in the *kuei*.
- Six-coat weather* . . Intensely cold.
- Son of Heaven* . . . The Emperor.
- Soy* Sauce. Condiment. Not *altogether* unlike what we call so in the West.

- Spirit stairway*An inclined path (usually between two flights of steps) on which only gods and spirits may tread. As beautifully and elaborately floored as possible. The Emperor was carried above it by bearers who walked on the steps on both sides of it. Even he might not walk or stand on it.
- Ta Jen*Great man.
- Tingchai*Runner. Yamên messenger.
- Travel palaces*Actual palaces built where the Imperial Family might care to break the journey when they traveled.
- Tsê Shih*A side inner apartment.
- Turquoise bird*Kingfisher.
- Vermilion pencil*The Imperial "pencil" used only by the Ruler. Edicts, etc., were signed with it.
- White Lily Sect*Boxers. A Boxer society.
- Yamên*Official residence—usually a mandarin's. A government office.
- Year of the Rat*1900.
- Yellow Banners*Stationed at the North of the Imperial City. They represented the earth element which subdues water.
- Yellow-clads*Priests. Monks.
- Yo shang yo fa*There is reward and there is punishment.

